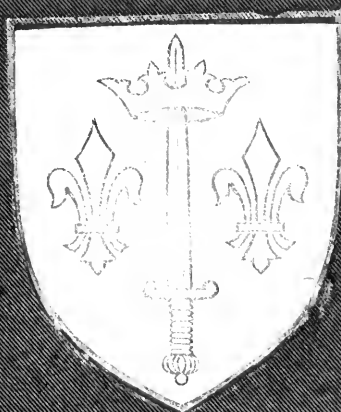


THE SHIELD
OF
THE FLEUR-DE-LIS



BY
CONSTANCE GODDARD DU BOIS

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THE SHIELD OF THE

FLEUR DE LIS

A NOVEL
BY

Constance Goddard Du Bois

AUTHOR OF

"COLUMBUS & BEATRIZ,"

"MARTHA COREY,"

"A MODERN PAGAN" ETC.



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BOSTON.

TO THE GLORIOUS MEMORY OF

Jeanne Darc

SAINT AND MARTYR

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED WITH LOVE
AND REVERENCE.


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THE SHIELD OF THE FLEUR-DE-LIS.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE INN.

T the close of a May day in the year 1434, a stranger applied for shelter at the miserable inn which was the sole refuge for the traveller whose course led him among the outlying villages on the borders of Lorraine. A swinging board to which a bush was attached announced the character of the place; and Jean Ribaut boasted that no one between Greux and Vaucouleurs gave better accommodation, lack of competition rendering the statement impregnable.

The young man who was driven by the fall of night to make proof of his hospitality was a soldier, and inured to hardship; and he gave more thought to the feeding and stabling of his horse, a fine Arabian, than to his own prospective comfort. He followed

the sleepy stable-boy to the stalls, where he helped to fill the manger with stubbly hay and the measure with chaffy oats, grumbling at the quality of the fodder, and swearing a few Greek oaths, which lost their energy of vituperation when pronounced by a mouth modelled like that of Phœbus. Robin, the hostler, stared to see the stranger groom his horse, wash its hoofs, and comb its mane, taking leave of his favorite at last with a caress to which the animal responded by fondling its owner's neck with a nose lifted for the moment from its oats.

"The beast and you are on good terms, I see," said Robin; "I marvel you can take the pains you do after a day's journey. My bones ache so at even that I fling down the fodder, and let well enough go unbettered. The creatures fare no worse than I if they have water and a bite to stay their stomachs. My master keeps me on the jump from morn to night. 'Tis Robin here, and Robin there, all the time. And now the May festival at Domrémy fills our house from attic to cellar. Master Jean de Metz comes from Vaucouleurs, as usual; and a great lord, who is stopping there on king's business, is coming this time, they say. All we have is bespoke. You will be lucky to get a corner to yourself, Master."

"What is the occasion of the festival you mention?" asked the young man.

“It used to be the habit here to keep the Feast of the Fountains,” was the answer. “Now that is changed. There is no more dancing and merry-making. Master Jean de Metz wants us all to be sad-faced, and go about as if at a funeral. They are to keep the vigil to-night in the convent on the hill; and to-morrow both churches will be decked in black, and there will be preaching and praying, and a procession, and Latin hymns; and people will come from far and near. This nobleman from the Court has ordered the best our house contains, and Mistress for two days has been as restless as a nesting hen when her brood is broken up. Master, too, gives a dozen orders in one breath: first a pig must be slain; then he is not sure but the great man would rather dine on calf’s meat, but Mistress says the heifer must be raised for breeding, and Josson must be persuaded to give us a sheep. So the saints alone can guide us.”

“But what is the object of the ceremony?” inquired the young man, as he left the stable followed by Robin’s shuffling steps. He waited for the answer while the hostler secured the door with a twisted withe, and a large stone which he rolled against the lower panel for greater security in the evident belief that no intruder would care to remove the weight that set him groaning.

“To-morrow is the day three years since Jeanne

Darc¹ perished at the stake," he said. "She lived in the village yonder across the brook. Many go now to look at the house. They call her a witch and a heretic; but our priest says she is a saint, and has seen her in visions since she died. You must ask him about it. He used to work cheek by jowl with me in the hayfield, when he came from Toul, where he lived, to visit his uncle who was cobbler in Domrémy. He had no more thought of being a priest than I had. I could tell some tales of him; but no matter. He was a good lad in the main, and sick with love for Jeanne Darc. He asked her to wed, and she said no. She never cared for aught but praying and church-going, for all she was friendly to every one. I mind how she rubbed my mother's leg when it swelled past all belief with the dropsy; and she cured it by prayer, or by rubbing, or by the favor of the Virgin. Later on the duke himself sent for her to cure him. All say she could do miracles; though Isabel Romée, she that is now Isabel du Lis, for they are all nobles, if you will believe it, and I must scrape and bow when I meet Jean and Pierre who are no better born than I—a strange thing is this gift of a pedigree when

¹ The spelling of the name of France's heroine used throughout this book has been adopted, both because it was that in use in her day, when the apostrophe was unknown, and also in protest against the customary English translation of the preposition, which is as inexcusable in this case as it would be in the following names: Madame of Staël, the Duke of Aumale, etc.

the king sends it in a parchment a yard long—well, Isabel Romée, or du Lis, the mother of Jeanne, says she never did a miracle, for which they accuse her of witchcraft, but that she is a saint, and her prayers were accepted of God.”

“You were going to tell of the priest’s love for Jeanne,” suggested the young man.

“Oh, ay, Father Ambrose; his name then was Pierre. He asked Jeanne to wed; and when her parents agreed, and she still refused, he haled her to Toul before the Official, and asked her in open court if she had not once promised to wed him, and if the judges should not force her to do as she had said. Jeanne stood up and answered him in her own defense; and they say it was a marvellous thing to hear her. The Official gave sentence in her favor, and Pierre came home in shame without a wife. They say he now does penance for the injury he thought to do her. He has been for three years in the convent, and is now ordained, and may shrive and bury, and say masses; and yet he is no older than I, and was no better instructed when Jeanne died. Since then he has been like one transformed.”

Robin’s words came to an end only when he parted with the guest at the inn door, where he consigned him to the tender mercies of the host.

Jean Ribaut gave him the end of a table, and set

a bowl of porridge before him; but the innkeeper and his wife were so absorbed in anxiety for the morrow, and in making preparation for the distinguished guest who was expected, that they had little thought to give to the young soldier who rode unattended, and whose clothes, though rich, were of a strange fashion, while his accent was that of a foreigner.

In answer to the questions which Marianne Ribaut felt it her duty to ask of every new-comer as to his name, home, station, and business, it was discovered that the stranger was a lord of Lorraine, and a native of Metz, Sire Robert des Armoises by name; that he had been educated by an uncle in the city of Constantinople, and that he was now on his way to his paternal home to enter upon his inheritance, which consisted of an old homestead within the city walls, and a patrimony of lands and estates in Lorraine and France.

Marianne was a respecter of persons, but she was also of a skeptical mind. These claims to wealth and rank did not accord with the simplicity of the stranger's appearance. She set them down to the credit of a traveller's imagination, ordered the slatternly maid-servant to make up a bed for the gentleman in the south-east corner of the attic room, already bespoken for three others, and then left him with-

out further concern. Jean Ribaut, finding that the stranger ordered the best wine, and drank it without criticism, asking no questions, was disposed to be more friendly.

He was a stout man, with a rubicund face; and if his habitual expression of stolid resignation was not that which Nature had designed to accompany the cast of his features, it was because fate, in the shape of his wife, had frustrated the happier possibilities of his destiny. When the door closed upon Marianne's anxious activities, a lurking smile crept into the corners of the innkeeper's loose lips; his thumbs sought the folds of his belt, allowing his hands to rest upon his portly hips; his head was thrown back, and his small eyes twinkled with shrewd observation. Sometimes then he would utter a ponderous witticism, matured by a week's deliberation. He would nod approval of his guests' remarks, and act as the master of ceremonies in introducing and explaining the meaning of each to the other, often confusing rather than elucidating the result.

Des Armoises, rising from his miserable meal, confronted his host thus established in front of the fire; and he, in turn, surveyed his guest with a paternal glance, while he chalked the score upon the wall, inadvertently adding double to the price of the sour wine, which had been left unfinished.

"Tell me, mine host," said Des Armoises, "something more concerning the wonderful Maid of France, who has honored your village by giving it a world-wide fame. I heard of her in the East; and I fancied her to be a doughty Amazon, riding to victory at the head of the armies of France, wrapped about with a religious veneration like that which invests our Pannagia. Little by little, rumors of a sad and tragic end have reached me; but how is it possible that the Saviour of France should perish at the stake as a witch and a heretic? Where were her armies? Where was the king? Was there a general rout? It cannot be, unless rumor lies; for every report was of some new victory for the French."

Jean Ribaut shuffled his feet uneasily upon the floor, and rubbed his hands together nervously; for the necessity of formulating a definite account of events concerning which his knowledge was vague and limited, made it more than ever difficult for him to marshal his thoughts into speech.

"You will hear all about it to-morrow," he said. "They are to talk of nothing else. Jean de Metz, who gave the money for Jacques's funeral, is to pay all the expense of this."

"And a hole it will make in his pocket," said an old shepherd who sat upon an inverted cask near the fire. He was dressed in a loose shirt, rusty leathern

small-clothes, and cloth gaiters, and wore a sheep-skin mantle buckled across his shoulders. He sipped a mug of home-brewed beer, and smacked his lips audibly at each draught.

“Who was this Jacques?” asked Des Armoises.

“Jacques Darc was the eldest son of Isabel Romée and of the elder Jacques Darc, his father,” said an old woman who made one of the circle about the fire, straightening herself as she spoke with the air of confident authority. “He was the brother of Jeanne, and he died as you may say of grief; for he took to his bed when he heard the news of the burning, and he never held up his head again. There are only two left now, Petit-Jean and Pierrelot. There was another girl, Catherine; but they say she was drowned last Michaelmas Day at Nancy, where she lived as servant to the duchess. Isabel Romée has had a deal of grief; but what is sent must be borne. Who knows that better than I, who have lost ten children where she has lost three?”

She looked about her with an air of grim satisfaction in the superiority of her experience.

“Thou didst never lose one at the stake, Mother Suzette,” ventured a by-stander.

“Did not the Burgundians burn the roof above my head six years ago next Lady’s Day, when my grandson, a babe, perished in the flames? Go to,

André; fire is fire, and some day, if not on this earth, thou shalt feel it."

A laugh at André's expense went round the circle.

"Will no one tell me how Jeanne Darc came to such a cruel fate?" asked Des Armoises, surveying the faces before him.

The old shepherd looked up, and replied: "'Tis naught else to tell. The girl Jeanne died at Rouen by being burned to death. Many a time has she kept her cows and sheep side by side with mine; and I never thought she would end so, but rather she than I. I am a quiet, humble man, and ask naught of kings and judges but to be let alone in my corner of the world, where I fear God and shun the devil. If Jeanne had been as well content with her place, and had obeyed her parents, who said 'Stay,' instead of the voice that bade 'Go,' she would never have suffered the pangs of judgment."

"Fie upon thee for thy answer!" cried Suzette. "If the worthy Jean de Metz had heard it, thy shoulders would have felt his staff. It was an angel who told Jeanne to go and save the King of France; and go she must, spite of father or mother. Right sore she wept for it. You know that, Josson, as well as I. But there are some men who will hide in a corner when the angel Gabriel blows his horn,

and will stop their ears pretending not to hear him. Much good it will do them."

Josson set down his mug bottom side up. "There are some women whose tongues are worse than the day of judgment," he said, rising slowly to his feet, and preparing to leave the room.

The landlord checked his progress by a gesture which the shepherd feigned to overlook, having visions of certain rudely chalked marks upon the wall where Jean Ribaut kept his score.

"Art going on the hill?" asked Ribaut, while Josson fingered the latch. Receiving an affirmative reply, he added, "if the gentleman from Metz is within reach, ask him to come to the inn and have speech with a noble soldier who wishes to hear of Jeanne Darc and the wars." Then, as the wearer of the sheepskin mantle slipped into the darkness, the landlord added, "He can tell more than priest or clerk; he is the one you should inquire of."

"Who is this townsman of mine?" cried Des Armoises. "I will gladly make his acquaintance."

Again Ribaut found himself at a loss for an immediate reply. Suzette, whose strength lay in her tongue, came to his relief. "He is the best man one can meet with in a summer's day," she said with energy. "He worshipped the Maid of Domrémy as one worships the Virgin; and he bears all the expense of the festival

to-morrow, as he did for Jacques's funeral. Jeanne, poor soul, had no funeral. They scattered her ashes upon the river."

"That is a lie of the English hounds," said Marianne, who entered with a long poker in her hand with which she prepared to extinguish the fire upon the hearth by scattering the brands and covering them with ashes. "I have heard many say that the flames did her no hurt, for she flew out of them to heaven in the shape of a dove. Only her heart was found; and that they could neither burn nor bury."

Marianne's entrance with the poker was a signal which the assembled company did not dare to disregard. It warned them of the hour when transient visitors were to betake themselves homeward, and the guests of the house were expected to seek their beds. Suzette rose reluctantly, and drew her cloak about her.

"Some folks are wise in their own conceits, and some are wise by right of their station," she said. "I am a poor body that only knows what I am told by those who have reason to speak the truth. If the gentleman wants to get at the root of all these matters he should ask Marianne Ribaut; or if he chooses to wait till to-morrow he will hear the whole history of Jeanne Dare told by Jean de Metz, her brothers, Father Ambrose, and Father Fulbert. It might be best for him to wait and hear them."

“What a tongue that woman has!” cried Marianne, flinging the bar into its socket with unnecessary energy as the last guest departed. Then she lit a rushlight, and prepared to show Des Armoises to his attic, informing him, in reply to his questions, that Jean de Metz was a young bourgeois living in the king’s service at Vaucouleurs, and it was he who had first set Jeanne on her way to the wars, taking her under his protection, and vowing his sword to her defense.

“Josson will not find him to-night, you may be sure,” said Marianne, “for he will be keeping vigil and fast with the brothers at the convent. To-morrow you will see him. He will lead the procession. It is he who has contrived everything. Isabel and Jacques agree to everything he says and does. It will be a great day for Domrémy.”

She left her guest with a good-night, taking the candle with her. Des Armoises flung himself upon his creaking pallet in a corner of the attic, as remote as possible from his neighbors, three snoring carriers whose pack mules he had noticed in the stable; and he slept with the self-abandonment of youth.

CHAPTER II.

THE VILLAGE FESTIVAL.



THE morning dawned warm and fair, and the neighboring villages of Domrémy and Greux were early astir in preparation for the event of the day. The interest of all was centered upon a small thatched cottage a stone's throw from the church, which formed the focus for the gathering.

A carved stone escutcheon, contrasting by the freshness of its color with the time-stained walls of the little house, bore the arms which had been given to the family of Dare, now Du Lis, — a drawn sword surmounted with a crown, with a fleur-de-lis on either side. Visitors to the village pointed this out, and remarked that the same design was carved upon the tombstone which bore the name of Jacques Dare; and it was also to be seen upon a memorial tablet in the church where the virtues and fame of the Maid of Orleans were recorded.

“And where is the grave of the other sister of whom I heard last night?” inquired Des Armoises.

Marianne Ribaut and Robin, urged equally by mo-

tives of curiosity and the desire to impart information, were his companions; but neither replied to this question with accustomed readiness of speech.

"She is not buried here; none knows where she lies," said Marianne.

Robin shrugged his shoulders, and distorted his face with a grimace. "None knows but there may be a scandal at the bottom of it," he said with a hoarse attempt at a whisper in Robert's ear. "She is gone; that we know. Her brother Jean says she was drowned in the Meuse. They searched, and the body was not recovered. Those who call Jeanne a witch say that the devil flew away with Catherine. But in my opinion the devil may have come in the shape of a man."

"Hold thy tongue, Robin," cried Marianne. "Thou must ever be chattering of things above thy intellect. None are so foolish as those who think they know more than their neighbors."

"Father Ambrose knows more than I, yet he will not tell," said Robin. "I know that man as I do myself. Have I not helped him steal the neighbors' ducks' eggs, and put smooth stones in their place? but it will not do to tell that and more now he's a priest and I but an hostler. But because of our youthful fellowship we are like brothers for knowledge of each other's faces. Say 'Catherine' to Ambrose, and see if he will not blush."

“Chattering fool! what must thou be after?” cried Marianne in amazement. “Those who slander a priest must fear halter and flame.”

“I mean naught against him,” Robin hastened to say; “only that if any one has reason to be sure whether Catherine is living or dead, it must be that he guesses the secret.”

“This is no place to talk of such things,” said Marianne. “When we are at home, I will wish to hear all that thou canst tell.”

Robin shook his head, and thrust his tongue into his cheek. “I have now said more than is for my good,” he replied.

Marianne drew her brows together in angry perplexity, wondering if the hostler’s chatter had any other cause than his jealousy of his old comrade’s rise in station. At this moment the side door of the church opened, and shut again behind two men who left it to cross the greensward to the cottage.

“Yonder is Jean de Metz, and Father Ambrose with him,” cried Marianne. “The procession will now begin to form.”

Des Armoises looked at the two with interest. His fellow townsman was a young man with a sallow, melancholy face, where suffering had left lines that gave it a look of age. His hair, too, was streaked with gray. His mouth drooped, and his look was fixed and stern.

His dress was careless ; and his manner was that of one who is mastered by an inward prepossession, and indifferent to the external world.

His companion was also plainly an exceptional character. He was dressed in a long black gown, and wore a square cap that hid the tonsure. A girdle about his waist bore a crucifix, which now and then he lifted and fingered mechanically as he talked. His shaven face was so mobile with expression that it seemed to betray his thoughts as they arose. His transparent skin flushed and paled like that of a young girl. His long, thin fingers clutched the crucifix convulsively, showing the tension of overstrung nerves.

Des Armoises, watching him keenly, was inclined to believe that Robin's estimate of his former friend might be in a measure correct. Father Ambrose was not yet far enough removed from his youth to bury its remorse, or to hide its scars.

One of the priest's bright, uncertain glances met Des Armoises's look, and lingered curiously upon him. De Metz passed by with his gaze fixed on vacancy. Both men entered the cottage, and a movement of expectancy was noticeable in the throng. Soon the young priest reappeared, leading the bereaved mother by the hand. De Metz followed, giving a supporting arm to Jacques Darc, whose tall form was bowed beneath the weight of his repeated griefs. The two sons with their

wives came next, other relatives and friends fell into line, and the procession moved slowly forward, crossed the churchyard, and paused in front of the memorial tablet where the name of Jeanne Darc was inscribed. Here all made the sign of the cross, and said a silent prayer.

At the steps of the church the venerable Father Fulbert met the people of his flock, and preceded them up the aisle to the chancel as if leading a funeral train. The short service of prayer and invocation was such as might be said over the grave of a martyr ; but Father Ambrose took his stand to address the congregation with a look of cheerful animation in his shining eyes.

“ Why do you mourn, my friends ? ” he said ; “ it is no time for tears. Jeanne Darc lives.” He paused, for there was a stir at the entrance. A small company of horsemen, dismounting at the church door, pushed their way into the edifice through the crowd that fell back before them, until they reached the foremost place, where their leader ostentatiously took his seat.

He was a strikingly handsome man of middle size, with restless black eyes which had a look of malignity in their sidelong glance. He wore a travelling-cloak of brocaded silk lined with rich fur, which reached below his knees, and being open in front displayed a short, plaited surcoat of Flanders cloth. His close-

fitting small-clothes terminated in riding-gaiters and long pointed shoes. His round felt hat was encircled with a gold chain, and an ostrich plume curled above its brim. He wore a dagger in his belt, and a short sword at his side. Two of his attendants, who remained standing at a respectful distance in the rear, were more heavily armed with maces and halberds. The third was dressed as a minstrel, and carried a guitar swung by a ribbon over his shoulder.

The nobleman, whose rank was announced to the gaping observers by the rich fur lining of his *houppelande*, remained with his hat in his hand regarding the preacher with a look of cynical amusement; for at sight of the newcomer, Father Ambrose had grasped the railing of his stand to save himself, as it seemed, from falling. The color deserted his cheeks, and he stared with projecting eyes and parted lips as if at some strange apparition.

The nobleman had recovered in a moment from an almost equal shock of surprise. The words which he had heard at his entrance had seemed like the utterance of the raving priestess of Delphi, inspired to reveal strange secrets.

"Go on, good preacher," he said, with a wave of the hand. "Let me not interrupt your discourse."

Father Ambrose passed his hand across his forehead, where drops of sweat had started forth. He raised his

eyes as if in silent prayer, and, without looking again at the faces before him, he continued, "It is the saints of Paradise who alone truly live. We feeble worms of the earth crawl through our allotted time, not knowing we are dead while we live. Jeanne Darc is in glory. I see her now with the eye of faith. St. Michael, with a smile more radiant than the lightning, places upon her brow a celestial diadem. St. Margaret and St. Catherine on either side present her with a lily, the perfume of which is a balm for earth's griefs, an earnest of immortality. She does not forget you, my friends. She prays for you each by name, loving you now as formerly. She who refused rank and title for herself gave to her family a place among the nobility of France. She who asked no favor for herself won from the king perpetual release from impost for the villages of her native place. Why should you grieve to-day when you commemorate her passage from earth to heaven? She went with tears and pain through a path of agony; but at its end she found the Lord Christ waiting to receive the martyr who died with his name upon her lips."

He ceased speaking, and with a bent head left his place, and took a seat in the stalls; while the old priest, greatly moved, came forward and stood in the centre of the chancel facing the assembled multitude with a tremulous smile.

“For the information of the strangers who are with us to-day,” he said, “I had meant to tell the story of our Maid of Domrémy, who is now known as the Maid of Orleans, and the Maid of France. Thus did her mission widen in its purpose. But in spite of my young colleague’s pious exhortations, and the strength of his faith which is also mine, I find my heart too heavy and my voice too full of tears for much speech. You know the goodness of her life, and have borne witness to it, when twice spies have been sent among us hoping to prove some evil thing against her. Again and again have they been confounded. Who is there among us that has not had evidence of her piety, charity, and good-will? When she had no gold to give, she gave her strength, her thought, and assistance. Who ever asked Jeanne Darc for aid and asked in vain? How young she was when she left us, yet how exalted in religious attainments, and in the knowledge and communion of that better world which my young colleague has pictured forth. To her it was present and real. The veil that hides it from our sin-dulled eyes was drawn aside for her. The blessed saints to whose voices our ears are deaf found hers attentive. She alone was chosen; for she alone was pure enough to hear, devoted enough to obey. We are told that her enemies still are mighty. Those who compassed her

death have done this greater evil, — they have covered her name with infamy. The Church, they say, has condemned her. Believe it not, my people. The Church is holy. Its false professors, who have sheltered their sin under the name of religion, shall one day be exposed and confounded. Righteousness shall be exalted. Truth shall flourish on the earth; and Jeanne Darc shall be reckoned in the company of the saints.”

Concluding thus, he repeated a short prayer, uttered a benediction, and dismissed the congregation, going to Isabel and Jacques, and laying his hands upon their heads for a special blessing while they knelt at his feet after the others had departed.

Jean de Metz, deserted now by Ambrose, who had disappeared, led the way once more, and the people followed to the convent of Our Lady of Bermont on the hill. Here the altar of the little chapel was decorated with flowers, and he who wished might kneel and tell his beads on the spot where Jeanne Darc had often prayed. Outside in the courtyard the good brothers had spread tables of refreshments for their visitors, where all who came and went during the day might break a loaf of wheaten bread, and taste a mug of the honey beer for which the convent was famed. The green meadow on the brow of the hill, edged by a border of dense forest, afforded a welcome resting-

place when hunger was satisfied; and the wide view of the valley showed the shining river and nestling hamlets, darkened here and there by the shadows of high-piled summer clouds.

The procession, as it came from the village, was met at the crest of the hill by a dozen or more of the gray-robed friars of the convent, who chanted a hymn as they moved slowly forward. By common consent, the straggling throng came to a pause in the meadow, and in various attitudes of repose prepared to listen to the further exercises of the morning. Jean de Metz, acting as master of ceremonies, claimed the attention of the multitude by a wave of the hand.

“Friends,” he said, with a kindling glance, “I have brought you here because from this high ground you can look forth upon the world of hill and vale, river and plain. In like manner I would have you make this day a vantage-point from which you can look forth upon futurity. This is the third time you have with me commemorated the martyrdom of Jeanne Dare on the recurrence of its anniversary, a day forevermore to be marked in the calendar in letters of blood. For the third time I bid you remember all that you owe to her, and that it is a debt that must be paid. Can you repay her? Does she need your help? Yes, I repeat to you; a duty is pressing upon us. Her memory must be cleared from the obloquy

that rests upon it. The people of France adore her as their saviour, their Messiah; but the condemnation written against her name by unjust judges has never been revoked. In vain has the Lord discharged his thunderbolts against her enemies. One by one they have come to strange and torturing deaths. Still those who remain are mighty against her; and neither prince nor king, bishop nor prelate, has appealed to the head of the church to rehabilitate his righteous servant in her integrity. I say to you that it must be done. Let each of you lay it to his heart as his dearest ambition that he may assist in this holy work. And that it may be done in our time, let each one make daily prayers to the Virgin and the saints. To cheer us now we will listen to a hymn composed by a famous poetess in honor of the Maid. Father Ambrose has written it out, and the good friars will sing it to us."

Upon this, two of the brothers, more musically endowed than their fellows, struck a few chords for prelude upon a couple of singularly shaped stringed instruments, a *dicorde* and an *archet*, and in quavering tones began to sing the following words: —

Jeanne de bonne heure née,
Beni soit cil qui te créa
Pucelle de Dieu ordonnée,
En qui le Saint-Esprit réa
Sa grand grace, et qui ot et a
Toute largesse de haut don,
Qui te rendra assez guerdon?

Merlin et la Sibylle et Bède
Plus de mille ans a, la véïrent
En esprit, et pour remède
A France en leurs écrits la mirent
Et leurs prophéties en firent.

Donc, dessus tous les preux passés,
Ceste doit porter la couronne
Car ses faits ja montrent assez,
Que plus prouess Dieu lui donne
Qu'à tous ceux de qui l'en raisonne,
Et n'a pas encore tout parfait.

Ne sai si Paris se tiendra
Ne si la Pucelle attendra ;
Mais s'il en fait son ennemie
Je me doute que dur escremie
Lui rende, si qu'ailleurs a fait.
S'il résiste heure ne demie,
Mal ira, je crois, de son fait,
Car ens entrera, qui qu'en grogne ?

Par elle Anglais
Seront mis jus sans relever.
Si est tout le moins qu'affaire ait
Que détruire l'Englescherie,
Car elle a ailleurs plus haut hait ;
C'est que la foi ne soit périe.

En Chrestienté et en l'église
Sera par elle mis concorde.
Les mescreants dont on devise
Et les hérites de vie ordre,
Détruira, car ainsi l'accorde
Prophétie qui l'a prédit.

Des Sarrasins fera essart
En conquérant la Sainte Terre ;
La menra Charles que Dieu garde
Ains qu'il muire fera tel erre

Cilz est cil qui là doit conquerre.
 La doit-elle finer sa vie
 Et l'un et l'autre gloire acquerre;
 La sera là chose assovie.¹

A harsh, discordant laugh greeted the conclusion of the hymn, and struck the ears of all present with the effect of a painful discord. Indignant eyes were turned upon the rude disturber of the solemnity. The nobleman who had leisurely followed the movement of the throng had flung himself upon the grass, and lay as if asleep, with a corner of his travelling cloak flung across his face. He now started up with the sardonic laugh which gained him the angry notice of the assembly.

¹ For the benefit of the curious reader, this may be paraphrased as follows:—

Jeanne, born in a happy hour,
 Blessed be the heavenly power
 That gave thee life; the Maid of God,
 With the Spirit's grace endowed,
 Highest gift and homage true
 Cannot yield thee all thy due.

Merlin's prophecy with Bede's
 A thousand years thy fame precedes.
 They saw thee with the spirit's eye,
 And made for France high prophecy.

Above the heroes of the past
 A virgin wears the crown at last.
 The deeds related urge her claim
 To highest meed of lasting fame;
 Nor can my verse declare the whole
 Till Time the finished tale unroll.

“I laugh at the absurdity of your singing a hymn in so triumphant a strain on an occasion like this,” he said. “You mourn the burning of Jeanne Darc as a relapsed heretic, and at the same time you recite the prophecy of her death as conqueror of the Holy Land. Are you able to reconcile the contradiction, most erudite and holy brothers?”

Jean de Metz, with flashing eyes, took the reply upon himself.

“The holy purposes of God were interfered with by the sin and treachery of man,” he said. “With

I know not yet will Paris yield,
Nor if the Maid will take the field;
But sure am I her just demands,
If scorned, claim vengeance from her hands
That elsewhere have put to fault
The proudest foe in rude assault.
The English fall no more to rise
When Jeanne her heavenly watchword cries;
She drives them forth with constant will,
And rids the Church of every ill.

All Christendom at peace will be;
She tolerates no heresy.
For Holy Church and Christ the Lord
She lives as prophecies accord.

The Saracens will yield to her
The Holy Land and Sepulchre.
King Charles will conquer where she leads,
And share the fame of glorious deeds.
In Palestine her life will end;
May Heaven the full completion send.

This contemporary witness to the scope of Jeanne Darc's mission is interesting as contradicting the gross errors of certain later historians concerning it.

the aid and sympathy of the King of France, and an undivided people behind her, Jeanne Dare would have chased the English from the land, united Christendom, and conquered, it may be, the Holy Land, as the famous poetess, Christan de Pisan, has foretold in her verse. Jeanne, betrayed and deserted, like her Master, dies in a city of the France she had saved." He buried his face in his hands.

"I knew her well," said the nobleman. "I was her companion in arms; and it chanced that I am particularly interested in all that concerns her. Therefore, being in Vaucouleurs, and hearing of your annual solemnity, I came hither on purpose to attend it. My name is Gilles de Laval. I am a marshal of France, the Marshal de Retz. You, Jean de Metz, I have seen before. Have you forgotten me?"

De Metz flushed quickly. Dislike and suspicion were written on his face as he turned and scanned the marshal with uneasy curiosity. "I have heard of your lordship," he said.

"And nothing good, if I may judge by your tone," replied the marshal with a laugh. "Yet was I a faithful comrade of the Maid. How well I remember the siege of Paris, to which your prophetess refers with discreet reservation as to the probable result. No man, in fact, could have foreseen the chance which defeated us. On the day of the final assault I was

close by the side of the Maid as she shouted the advance in that soft woman's voice of hers, that could ring like a clarion when the arrows were flying: 'On, on, my brave soldiers! One more charge, and Paris is ours!' Then she came to the trenches, full of muddy water, and stopped aghast. 'On, Jeanne!' I said; 'why stop for a trifle like this?' I knew not but that angel hands might bear her onwards. But, independent of miraculous aid, she had a wondrous power of judgment in that girlish head of hers; and, after cautiously sounding the water with the staff of her standard, she bade bring fagots, and fill the trenches. Just then the king's word came, ordering the retreat. La Trémoille, in fact, gave the command, and the king spoke as his mouth-piece. Jeanne obeyed, with tears of disappointment streaming from her eyes."

De Metz groaned, and clinched his hands.

"You have named the Judas who betrayed the innocent blood," he exclaimed.

"La Trémoille has fallen," said the marshal, with significant emphasis.

De Metz nodded, while his eyes shone with triumph.

"The vengeance of God overtakes her enemies," he said. "Still it delays its full accomplishment."

"I have something further and more particular to relate to you on this subject," said the marshal, look-

ing about him furtively. "Here we are too public. Come to my lodging this evening, and sup with me. I shall remain in this neighborhood until the morrow."

De Metz agreed, his eager interest in the subject overcoming his antipathy to the man.

At this moment a new speaker came forward to address the assembly. It was Friar Martin, the superior of the little convent—a tall, spare man, with sunken cheeks and hollow eyes, and the unhealthy color of one who seldom breathed the out-door air. He seemed as much out of place in the smiling May meadow as a blinking owl driven forth unwillingly into the sunshine. By reason of his taste for seclusion, the prior had the reputation of a learned man, to support which character cost him little effort in the station where his lot was cast.

"It was a thousand years ago, my friends," he began, "that the great Merlin in his prophecy declared that the signs of the zodiac should enter into war, and that a virgin should tread underfoot the bearer of the bow, that is to say, the English. An ancient book, which I have heard of, but not seen, gives it as part of his prophecy that the virgin will come from the *Bois Chenu*, on the borders of Lorraine. This has been singularly fulfilled. We are here on the borders of the *Bois Chesnu*, yonder forest, which shelters us from the wintry blast, and gives us the wood

which cooks our food and warms us in winter. With much trouble I have obtained for this occasion a copy of a Latin poem made by a learned monk in the city of Orleans, at the time when the English besiegers were at the gates, and no one knew where to turn for aid. He had fallen asleep in his cell one evening with the words of Merlin's prophecy in his mind; and in his sleep he seemed to see an angel, who presented him with a scroll, the legend of which he wrote out when he awoke, as I will now give it to you;" and the prior repeated the following lines, regardless of the fact that they were unintelligible to the greater part of his hearers : —

"Virgo puellares artus induta virili
Veste, Dei monitu, properat relevare jacentem
Liliferum regemque; suos delere nefandos
Hostes praecipue qui nunc sunt Aurelianis
Urbe sub, ac illam deterrent obsidione
Et si tanta viris mens est se jungere bello
Arme sequique sua, quae nunc parat alma Puella,
Credit et fallaces Anglos succumbere morti,
Marte puellari Gallis sternerentibus illos,
Et tunc finis erit pugnae, tunc foedera prisca,
Tunc amor et pietas et caetera jura redibunt,
Certabunt de pace viri, cunctique favebunt
Sponte sua regi, qui rex librabit et ipsis
Cunctis justitiam quos pulchra pace fovebit,
Et modo nullis erit Anglorum pardiger hostis
Qui se Francorum praesumat dicere regem."

"You will give us the meaning in good French, I hope, father," said De Metz.

“I hope the angelic visitant is not quoted verbatim,” said the marshal with his cynical smile. “I should be loath to believe that the heavenly inhabitants converse in Latin so barbarous as this.”

“As to that you may form your own conclusion,” said Friar Martin with dignity. “The meaning in common speech is this:—

“The virgin, her maiden limbs clothed with manly garments, hastens to relieve the prostrate lily-bearing king. She will destroy the wicked foe, especially those who are now under the walls of Orleans, and keep her from the siege. If there is courage enough in the men to join the war and follow the arms which now the blessed Maid prepares, she believes that the perfidious English will fall a prey to death, the French scattering them under the martial lead of the Maid. Then there will be an end of fighting; then will return the ancient covenants and love and piety and other laws. Then will they contend for peace; all together of their own accord will they favor the King, who will dispense justice to all whom he cherishes in beautiful peace. Then there will no longer be an English foe who presumes to call himself king of the French.”

“Another unfulfilled prophecy,” said the marshal, rising and stretching himself with a yawn. “But enough of prophecy and psalm-singing. Here comes

a train of the nymphs of the forest. Let us follow where they lead."

A company of young girls dressed in white, with garlands in their hands, walked slowly up the winding path that led from the village; and at their approach a general movement took place among the crowd, who were waiting for this signal to seek the rendezvous of former May-day festivals, the fairy spring in the forest. A few rods within the woods an open glade made a centre for converging foot-paths, which ended where a spring bubbled out of the earth at the foot of a gigantic beech. The natural fountain was furnished with a stone coping, and a paved channel for outlet. The water was so clear that the movement of the sand at the bottom under the impulse of the bubbling waves could be plainly seen. The branches of the tree decked with the fresh leaves of early summer lightly swept its surface as the wind swayed their elastic tips.

"This is where the fairies used to dance on moonlight nights," said Robin to Des Armoises, whose side he had regained after having been for a time unwillingly left behind. "I mind well that my godmother told me that when she was a girl she saw a lady all in white rise out of the water, and float through the air into the forest; and Mother Suzette will tell you that in her day voices have been often heard about the

tree; but since the priests blessed the fountain and sprinkled the beech with holy water fairies have not been seen. Every one knows that the water has a miraculous power to cure the sick. Folks with rheumatism and palsy will come to the Fountain of the Branches from miles around. You must taste the water before you leave, Messire. And if you are tired you will forget it; if you have an ache or a pain, it will leave you."

"So this is the fairy beech," exclaimed the Marshal de Retz. "I have heard that the enemies of Jeanne Dare made use of her mention of this tree to assist them in formulating the accusation of witchcraft against her."

"Thus they attempted to distort all the facts of her life," said Jean de Metz. "It was formerly the custom in the village to hold the Festival of the Fountains here on the fourth Sunday in Lent; and Jeanne with her companions would sing and dance about the tree, and hang garlands on the branches. Since her death the Lenten festival has been given up; but on this day of commemoration her former companions repeat the dance and the song in her memory."

The group of young girls had begun a dance with slow pacing feet and swaying arms about the fountain and the tree. They sang a mournful song in a minor key, in which the name of Jeanne often recurred; and

when they had thrice made the round they hung their garlands on the branches, and departed, pausing as they went to dip their fingers in the spring, and moisten their lips with the water.

The gathering now broke up, each in departing taking a drink of the fairy spring. Des Armoises, Jean de Metz, and the marshal descended the hill together.

“Some day,” said the marshal, “I will give a festival in honor of the Maid of Orleans which shall be worthy of her. I shall have the scenes of her life acted out by trained players in a mystery where all shall be seen exactly as it occurred. Angels with gilt wings shall appear on the scene. The French and English shall fight before the eyes of the spectators. Hippocras shall flow as freely as the water of your village spring. All France shall take note of the affair, while the report of your celebration goes hardly beyond the nearest town.”

“Ah, that could be done by a great lord like your worship, if you had the will,” said De Metz. “Would that it might help to hasten the day of her rehabilitation.”

“The future may have a surprise in store for you,” said the marshal. “What would you say, Master Jean, if one told in your ear that Jeanne never suffered the death at Rouen? that at this hour she lives and is well?”

Both De Metz and Des Armoises started. The marshal laughed as he observed them. "Meet me, both of you, at sunset," he continued. "I will then explain my meaning, and entertain you with a story you will be glad to hear."

He left them with these words, as if unwilling to be questioned, and went to rejoin his attendants, who were waiting with the horses near the church door, a centre for the curious and admiring gaze of the small boys of Domrémy, who had never had the luck to see accoutrements so splendid as the embroidered housing of the marshal's gray charger and the richly fashioned garments of his men.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE COTTAGE.



O you think he speaks truth?" asked Des Armoises eagerly, when he was left alone with his fellow townsman. De Metz shook his head with a sigh. "It is an old story," he said. "It has been maintained from that day to this by those who loved Jeanne and refused to credit the fact of her death as something too horrible to be true. Alas, I have learned that nothing is too sad to be possible. Only in an imaginary world does right triumph, and the just cause prevail."

"If it were true, the first to be told of it should be that grief-stricken household yonder," said Des Armoises, pointing to the cottage whose roof was visible among the trees. "I shall never forget the look of that mother's face."

"Come with me, and you shall learn to know her," said De Metz. "Do not mention what you have heard, for false hopes must not again disturb her. For a year or more Isabel Romée refused to believe that Jeanne

was dead. Every flattering rumor started by the credulity of the common folk kept her in an agitation which was worse than settled despair. Now she accepts the truth. Father Ambrose has seen Jeanne in visions, and has had words of consolation from her for her family. He is a man of wonderful spirituality. He fasts and mortifies the body until he is often nearer to the other world than this."

"Perhaps the family will not permit the intrusion of a stranger to-day," said Des Armoises as they neared the cottage.

"I like your face," said De Metz. "I noticed the sympathy you gave to all that was said in praise of Jeanne. I will present you to the family as a friend;" and urged by the pressure of De Metz's hand upon his arm, Des Armoises found himself within the cottage and the centre of the group before the hearth.

Isabel and Jacques, with their sons near them, sat on either side of the wide fireplace, whose smoldering embers had lately cooked the dinner of which the guests who crowded the farther room, relatives of near or distant degree, were even now partaking, and none the less heartily that the family of Du Lis refused to break their fast on this anniversary of their greatest sorrow.

Isabel nodded to De Metz, and stared with lustreless eyes at his companion.

"This is a gentleman who is a native of my own city

of Metz, and is now on his way there," De Metz explained, while Pierre hastened to bring seats for the guests. "He has taken part in our festival, and wishes to pay his respects as a friend to the family of Jeanne Dare."

"I have learned to measure your grief by my sympathy for it," said Des Armoises. "It has touched me deeply."

Isabel's thin lips quivered into an incredulous smile.

"What can you or any one else know of it?" she said. "Our grief is measureless. First Jeanne, then Jacques, then Catherine; burned, wasted, and drowned. Jacques used to sit where you are sitting, and look with horror at the flame there on the hearth. 'Mother,' he said, 'I could live if I did not have to see a fire.' One day near the last of his life, I found him sobbing with anguish. He had burnt his hand in the hot coals. 'Foolish lad,' I said; 'if so careless, canst not bear the pain?'—'Ay, the pain in the hand, but not in the heart,' he said; 'I held it there in the flames on purpose, and thought of Jeanne.'"

Isabel spoke in a monotonous voice, without emotion; but at her words a burst of grief arose from those within the room, whose number had been reinforced by some of those at table. The old man opposite her bent forward in his seat, and tore his scanty gray locks with a frantic gesture.

She looked at him with some concern. "I did not know he would understand," she murmured.

"Control yourself, mother," said Pierre, the younger son, advancing with a frown. "Of what use is it to bring up these miserable thoughts? The dead are dead. Consider those who remain, whose lives are still precious."

"Why, then, have this day of prayer and preaching and visiting to urge the dead upon our remembrance?" asked Isabel with calm incisiveness. "Ask Master Jean de Metz why he comes here to disturb us. Why cannot he leave us in peace, and let us forget? But when all are bent upon remembering Jeanne, let them give a thought to Jacques and to Catherine. He was the best lad; a heart of gold. He never gave me trouble. He was the one I could best lean upon; and he is the one who must be taken. Then, when all praise Jeanne, let them not blame Catherine because she saw no angels, and was not elected to be a saint. She was a good girl, and did her duty in her station as maid-servant to the duchess. It is a station as high as many. For she was well liked and trusted; and when she came last to visit us, she showed me a ring that the wife of Duke René had given her. She little thought she was to wear it to her death. It was that day fortnight she disappeared.

They found her hood on the river-bank at Nancy.

She was drowned, they say; and we must believe it, and ask no questions. There is no justice for those who are born as peasants, even when they are made noble by the gift of the king."

"Heavens, mother!" cried Pierre, "what evil spirit possesses you to torture us with these senseless suspicions? If there had been proof of foul play, justice would have been done our family as soon as the best in the land, for the king is bent upon honoring us. But nothing could be learned of Catherine's disappearance. She was drowned by accident no doubt,—a false step in the darkness. Why talk of it now when our hearts are sore and heavy?"

"Oh, ay," said Isabel, "that is all the comfort I can expect. You are young, and can forget. Old people must remember the children they have borne and nourished when they are lost to them."

"I am sorry you find her thus," said Pierre, turning to his guests. "Some days she will sit like my father, without opening her mouth; but the service at the church to-day, and the sight of the crowd, excited her. Perhaps it would be well, Master Jean, to let this matter drop out of remembrance for a time. This yearly commemoration can only renew our grief; and to what purpose?"

"No wonder France is ungrateful, when Jeanne's own family wish to forget her," cried De Metz in deep

displeasure. "It is the purpose of my life to do justice to the fame of the Maid of Orleans. You know my mind, Pierre; I have often told you of it."

"Ay, and I thank you for your good-will," said Pierre; "but time will work its own cure. When the English are once driven from the land, when our cruel distractions are healed, the people will remember Jeanne and what she did for them. The present concerns me more than the past. What is the use of burdening it with all the grief of yesterday?" He rose and set the door ajar to let in the breeze and sunshine. The small, low room was oppressively close.

De Metz followed him with a silent bow of farewell to the others. "They tell me, Pierre," he said, "that the king has promised to give you a rich grant of land as a reward for your services in the war. You will soon be a great man. Already you show the tokens of it. But remember to whom you owe nobility and promotion."

Pierre flung back his head with an angry frown. "It is not those who protest the most who have the deepest feelings," he said. "I need no one to instruct me in my duty to my sister's memory."

De Metz sighed heavily as Des Armoises rejoined him outside.

“I fear my pains have been vain,” he said. “My heart was set upon this festival; yet what has it accomplished?”

“Believe that you contrived it for my pleasure, and take my thanks for it,” said Des Armoises. “I have been deeply interested and impressed. In no other way could I have learned so intimately the history of your famous heroine as by the scenes of this day, which have brought her character so vividly to mind.”

Des Armoises spoke from the heart. He was surprised to find to what an extent the subject had enthralled his imagination. The image of the Maid of Orleans took form and color, gained in verisimilitude and proportion, until it stood like a life-endowed Galatea in the inmost shrine of his fancy. Womanhood must henceforth pass comparison with this *eidolon* in order to win his admiration. Indeed, the young man had always had a yearning for moral beauty in the feminine type, remembering an idolized mother; and he had scorned the lesser good while accommodating himself to it, feeling the thorn pricks of conscience in every relinquishment of his ideal. He felt stirred with the enthusiasm of a new devotion, and happily agitated by the thought that it was perhaps possible to encounter the object of it alive and in the flesh; for who could prejudge the marshal's story without hearing its evidence? He would not encounter De Metz's skepti-

cism by a discussion of the subject ; but he parted with his melancholy companion with the understanding that they should meet at sunset at the inn. This rendez-vous was punctually observed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SONG OF JEANNE DARC.



THE inn yard was deserted, except for a few gaunt pigs and stray hens that were engaged according to their several habits in making a meal out of the scattered fragments of the dinner flung within their reach. As the two young men approached, Robin ran out of the rick-yard with a heavy sack of provender flung over his shoulders.

"No chance for supper here," he called to Des Armoises. "A pest on the marshal of France, who has put all upside down. You may house yourself, and sup on bare boards, if you can find a crust in the cupboard. The inn and its keepers are turned out of doors."

He continued to run towards the river-bank, where it would appear that the household of Ribaut had betaken themselves with all their possessions; for there the phlegmatic Jean and the indefatigable Marianne were to be seen, surrounded with goods and

chattels of various sorts, engaged in superintending their ferriage to an island at no great distance from the shore, where the walls of the ruined château of Domrémy still maintained an appearance of dilapidated grandeur.

“Bad luck fall upon the Marshal de Retz!” cried Marianne, as Des Armoises approached her with a good-humored inquiry as to the cause of her unusual occupation. “Our inn is not good enough for his high mightiness, and he must needs lodge with bats and rats in the château. Worse than that, we must upset all to serve him with bed and board there, where none but ghosts have walked these twenty years. He has the evil eye, and has bewitched us, or else we are gone crazy to do his bidding. I liked not his look when first I saw him; but he is free with his gold, and comes from the Court, and therefore Jean Ribaut will crawl in the dust to please him.”

The burly Jean, whose portliness of frame contradicted this bold metaphor, frowned at his wife, and laid his finger on his lips.

“Hold thy tongue,” he said, jingling the coins in his pocket with an air of contentment. “For this cask of wine and the labor of moving it, I get more than Jossion and André and the rest would have paid me in months for the price of their mugfuls, reckoned with interest at usury. There is no haggling

about my charges; and for all that we suffer by flood or field, the marshal shall pay double and treble."

"Have a care to thyself, friend, if attempting to cheat my master," cried a voice in his ear; and the innkeeper started to see one of the marshal's men close at his side, his halberd over his shoulder. "Belike, thou takest me for a common soldier; but I may as well tell thee that I am a man of the church, a priest, though on occasion I doff my gown. I am also a wizard of no mean repute. The ghosts of the castle shall haunt thee to-night, if the beds provided for our use are no better than those I see yonder. Bring out thy own geese-feather mattress; and if there are any extra bottles of a choice vintage kept in the cupboard whose key hangs at thy girdle, thou shalt not sleep unless they grace my master's table."

So saying, he strode forward and sprang into the heavily loaded boat in which the ferryman was making ready to push out from shore.

Jean Ribaut grew pale, and crossed himself. "How did he know of the chimney cupboard?" he whispered to his wife, who stood aghast. "It must be he is a wizard, as he says. More wizard than priest, I warrant. Run, get the bottles, Marianne, and tell Jacquard to bring the feather bed, and add a roast pullet for the marshal's table; for already my blood runs cold, and I feel a strange weakness in the calves of my legs."

“Thou art a fool, Jean Ribaut,” retorted Marianne. “A good Christian, whose conscience is clear, has no cause to fear the devil;” but as she spoke she thrust her thumbs inwards, and secretly made the sign of the cross, resolving that the marshal should taste the best of her stores.

The two flat-bottomed barges which served for ferry across the river-shallows went back and forth many times before the Marshal de Retz was installed, conformably to his whimsical wish, in the one remaining tower of the ruined castle. Des Armoises and his companion, as soon as their presence was observed, were bidden to make part of his company for the night.

The château of Domrémy had been uninhabited, as Marianne had said, for twenty years, and comfort within its walls was out of the question; but the warm summer night made a canopy of star-bespangled sky more desirable than the low smoke-begrimed ceilings of the inn, and Des Armoises rejoiced in the sweet breath that came across the river meadows, and in the picturesque effect which the deepening shadows lurking under arch and buttress gave to the ancient pile.

The drawbridge had fallen to decay. The rusty portcullis hung awry in its frame. The gradual falling of the walls had filled the moat with piles of rubbish. Grass grew over the untrodden courtyard,

as it did over the greater part of the island, kept green and luxuriant by the mists that rose from the river. The cows and goats of Domrémy and Greux, when astray for many days, were searched for and often found upon the island where the peasants and their flocks sought refuge in times of danger, the sweet taste of the herbage lingering as a memory in bovine minds.

The marshal stood in the doorway of the tower, and gave a hand to Des Armoises and De Metz in turn.

"You are welcome," he said. "Jean de Novelonpont, or De Metz, is an old comrade of mine, though he fails to remember me as a friend. You, Sire Des Armoises, come riding from the East in quest of adventures, like Guyon and the rest of the knights of chivalry of whom my jongleur will sing to you till you are weary enough to sleep in even such a fox-hole as this. Then I will tell you, as I promised, my story of the Maid, which is as strange as a page from a romance."

His restless eyes, which turned from side to side without the power to give or to encounter a steady gaze, met and crossed Des Armoises's look. The young man felt a shudder of instinctive repugnance. Many people experienced this uneasy consciousness of anxiety or repulsion in De Retz's presence, and murmured a charm against the evil eye.

A couple of bats frightened by the torches whirled in a sudden flight across the marshal's face, flapping it with their leathery wings. The contact aroused a fury in the man; and forgetting to play the benignant host, he drew his sword with a quick imprecation, and cleft the air right and left, up and down, with the agility of a practiced swordsman. The devious flittings of the bats and the flashing sword-cuts made intersecting circles here and there, until at last one of the intruders met the blade and fell before it.

"A dead bat," cried De Retz with a hollow laugh, "a noble foe, for perhaps it embodied the soul of the churlish Lord of Domrémy, who resents our intrusion of his domain. Take it, François, for the nightly bubbling of thy wizard's caldron."

He lifted the body of the bat by the tip of the wing, and flung it at his attendant, who looked up with an angry frown.

"He is a wizard, but a benevolent one," continued the marshal. "He will tell your fortunes better than the best astrologer. He is a better prophet than Christan de Pisan. Build up the fires, my men. The dampness of a tomb is in these moldy walls. Seat yourselves, gentlemen; for the supper is ready, and our landlord's sour wine will be grateful if it has strength to warm our veins."

Although the marshal made a show of cheerful hospitality, a gloomy constraint had fallen on his guests, which a tolerable supper and Jean Ribaut's best wine could not enliven.

"Something of the chill of the place has touched our spirits," said De Retz. "François, call my jongleur, and bid him string his guitar, and sing us one of his old *chançons de geste*."

The musician thus introduced entered the circle with a bow to each in turn. He was a man between forty and fifty; but his snow-white hair and thin, bent frame suggested a greater age. His eyes were bright, and their look keen and intelligent, but at times anxious and full of an uneasy suspicion, which was contradicted by the assumed gayety of his manner when he talked or sang. His hands were slim and white as those of a woman; and the delicacy of his features suggested refinement and distinction, ideas ludicrously at variance with his costume, the parti-colored garments, slouch hat, and wide-sleeved mantle of a minstrel.

"Noble lords and ladies fair, though here I err, for there are none of the latter, God give you his blessing," he began, running his fingers over the strings for prelude. "What shall I sing? Will you have the tale of the noble Gui de Bourgogne, or do you prefer the famous combat of the peerless Oliver with

the noble giant Fierabras? Or would this young knight with the fair countenance like better to hear of the loves of Doön and Nicolette? All are at the tip of my tongue. The peers of Charlemagne are better known to me than the noble knights and men-at-arms who follow our royal master, Charles of France, in his illustrious wars against the ancient enemies of our country. The *trouvère* who is to write of their renown has not yet appeared. Poetry, alas! has taken flight from our unhappy land; and only in the south, where the barbarous *langue d'oc* vexes the ear, do they still make pretense of verse-making. We must turn to the past, the golden age of chivalry, to find the models of all knightly virtues embalmed in melody like a fly in amber. Choose, then, my masters, and the best efforts of my art shall be at your command."

"David's tongue runs like the clapper of a mill-hopper," said De Retz. "Give him a subject for his song, that we may have less of his speech. What shall it be, a love ditty for our young knight-errant from the East, whose face was made to please the women?"

"No," exclaimed Des Armoises; "love and I forever parted company a twelvemonth since. Sing us a tale of war and carnage, blood running to the saddle-bow, some of the wondrous deeds of Oliver or Roland."

"There is none better than the old song of Fiera-

bras," said the minstrel; and, touching his guitar, he began to sing:—

“Fierabras d’Alixandre fist moult a redouter ;

Là où voit Olivier sel prent a apeler ;

‘Olivier, or vien avant, si me venras armer,

Savoir se te porroie de bataille tourner.’

Et respont Olivier, ‘Oserai m’i fier ?’

‘Oil,’ dist Fierabras, ‘ne t’en estuet douter,

Ja ne serai traïtes tant com puisse durer.’

Et li doi baron brocent, si ont esperonné;

De plain eslais s’encontent du tout abandonné.

Mirvilleus caus se donnent, bien se sont encontré,

Ha Diex ! com rice jousté ! mainte gent l’ont loé.”

“Not that antiquated Picard jargon of a century ago,” cried De Retz impatiently; “my ears already ache with the barbarous phrases they have been tortured with to-day. Sing us your song of Jeanne Darc, David; it will serve as a prelude to my tale.”

David flushed quickly, and looked shyly about him, as he said, “I told you, gentlemen, that poetry was dead in France; but I was like a maiden who denies her love while caressing some jewel that is its token. I myself have made a *chançon de geste* on the subject of our heroic Maid. My master encourages me to believe that it will live on the lips of singers long after my bones are dust; but as yet he alone has heard it. I am loath to give it to an unsympathetic world. Grant me indulgence for all shortcomings, and I will sing it to you; but first, let me explain that, in order to

construct the framework of the piece, it was necessary to falsify history according to the amiable habit of the *trouvère*, who exalts imagination above fact. Jeanne, like Charlemagne in the songs that praise him, must absorb in her own person all the glory of the time ; and, to make her end effective, it must be left shrouded in mystery. She disappears: is it to die, or to reappear in triumph to the discomfiture of her enemies? Judge from the song."

In a mellow voice he began to sing to the accompaniment of his guitar the words of the last *chançon de geste*. It was marked by a beauty of versification, a vigor of action, and a strength of construction, which placed its merit far above the similar compositions of a former age. It was an epic of the times, having for its central object the figure of the Maid, exaggerated into the proportions of a heroine of romance. History was sacrificed to poetical necessity. The *trouvère* could not picture Jeanne dejected by the perfidy and indifference of her allies, weeping at the retreat from Paris, betrayed to her enemies at Compiègne. The Maid of the song was invulnerable and omnipotent, a serene image of victory, riding from conquest to conquest. By turns she besieged and took Bordeaux, Bayonne, Dieppe, Paris, Harfleur, Caen, and all the cities of Normandy, except Rouen, before whose walls she disappeared, without leaving a trace. A prophecy of her reappear-

ance might be gathered from the closing lines. David held the attention of his auditors from first to last. Des Armoises was struck by the art of the composition. The tedious recurring rhyming syllables were varied by the skill of the poet, who avoided monotony of accent, while preserving the prescribed form of the verse. The dialogue of the personages, in which the *trouvères* delighted, was employed by David in scenes of genuine dramatic power. A vein of satire was displayed in the delineation of the royal puppet, who was moved about at the will of the Maid whose generosity restored to him a kingdom.

De Retz and Des Armoises applauded loudly at the close. De Metz sat lost in thought.

"It is well done," he said, "but it is not the truth. Jeanne suffers at the hands of her friends. I beg you will not give this to the world, good minstrel, until the reality of her life is more clearly sifted from the chaff of envy and detraction. For your clever verses would further obscure her genuine character, which was that of an inspired saint, rather than a conquering Amazon."

David laughed, and gave no promise. Neither he nor De Metz could foresee the singular fate that awaited the poem.

After the minstrel's untimely end, the forgotten manuscript was found by a pompous courtier given

to the pursuits of literature, and eager for a fame which was beyond his acquirement, since he was handicapped by a heavy wit and slow performance. He dared not pose as a p^oet; but he chopped David's graceful rhymes to pieces, and reunited them with clumsy prose which hardly served to obscure their original metrical form, while forever distorting them and obliterating their merits. He added an account of Jeanne's death and burial in a costly sepulchre, which was equally at variance with the facts of history and the purpose of the poet; and concluded with a sycophantic reference to a royal patron, by describing the marriage of Charles VII., and mentioning that king's descendants to the third generation.

In this form the so-called "Chronicle of Lorraine" has been a thorn in the side of historians from that day to this. They have gravely considered it from all points of view except the true one, deprecating its inconsistencies, amazed at its statements, and never beholding in its mangled and distorted shape the *chançon de geste* of the last *trouvère*.

The shadows deepened beneath the arches of the tower; and the full moon, an hour high, sent shafts of light through loophole and doorway, discovering each crevice which Time's battering-ram had made in the crumbling walls.

"Come," said De Retz, "since David has finished

his song, I will tell you my tale. Let us walk upon the terrace while we talk."

The two young men willingly followed him into the fragrant night. The eastern façade of the tower gleamed in the moonlight, as if built of white marble; and the marshal's shadow was cast like a blot upon the dazzling sand where he stood, thoughtfully regarding his companions, who had seated themselves upon a fallen pillar in expectation of the promised narrative.

"I was, as you know, the companion at arms of Jeanne Darc," he began. "I rode at her side when we entered Orleans, and shared the welcome that was given her on that memorable occasion. I was one of the most honored assistants at the consecration of the king at Rheims. In reward for my services I was that day made marshal of France; and I was one of the four knights deputed to bear the sacred vial from the abbey of Saint-Rémi to the church of Notre Dame. The abbé bore the holy vessel on a fringed cushion; while De Bossac, Graville, the admiral, and myself, on horseback, armed at all points, with our banners in our hands, served as his escort; and rode thus into the church as far as the choir, and back again to the abbey when the service was ended. It was a notable time. Jeanne, as she stood, standard in hand, beside the altar, was a figure never to be forgotten.

“I remember a different scene, when the messenger brought the news from Rouen to the king. La Trémoille had taken pains that the tidings should not reach the king’s ears till after he had supped, and was taking his ease, engaged in a game of cards with some of the lords and ladies of the court. It may be, messire, that in the distant East you have never seen a pack of cards, and know not what study it requires to understand them and the games that are played with them. In the first place, there is an emblematical and allegorical significance in every color, heraldic device, and floral design. Then there is a historical and poetical meaning in the figures and their names which only the initiated can discover. Thirdly, there are to be considered the number and value of the spots, of various forms, *croissant* or *carreau*, *trèfle*, *pique*, and *cœur*, and the different combinations to which they can be put.

“The king sat at a table with Gérarde Gassinel at his right, and Étienne Chevalier at his left. La Trémoille leaned familiarly upon Charles’s shoulder. The messenger entered the anteroom. A chamberlain took the word from his lips, and repeated it in a loud voice, forgetting ceremony in excitement. ‘Jeanne Darc has been burned at Rouen,’ he cried without preliminary. Charles grew pale, and would have risen in disorder; but La Trémoille gently detained him by

the pressure of his hand upon his shoulder, while with the other hand he gathered up the cards which the king's trembling fingers would have let slip. 'Remember, Sire,' he said, 'that in the game of piquet the king of spades outranks the queen of diamonds.' You should know, messire, in order to understand the aptness of the allusion, that the king of spades, whose name is *Apollin*, represents Charles VII., and the queen of diamonds, whose device is *En toy te fie*, stands for Jeanne Darc.

"Charles sank back into his chair without uttering a word; and La Trémoille played his cards to the end of the game, though the king no longer lent it his attention."

Des Armoises uttered an exclamation of incredulous horror, and Novelonpont started in angry excitement.

"Is it for this you have brought us here?" he cried, "to relate the stale gossip of the court, where more than one disgraceful scene has been enacted that would better be forgotten. Answer me these questions, Lord de Retz. Who shut the gates of Compiègne in her face, and left Jeanne to be taken by her enemies? Who stood aloof, and made no sign for rescue or ransom when she was held a prisoner at Beaurevoir? Who allowed the completion of the devil's pact by which she was sold to the English fiends? Who ignored the lingering agony of her

trial, and made no protest against the deed at Rouen, the most heinous crime that blots the annals of history, saving only the greater crime at Calvary. Charles the King must answer to each accusing question at the bar of God's judgment; though to each La Trémoille also must plead guilty as the instigator of the villainy, and the king as wax in his hands."

"These are bold words, Novelonpont," said the marshal. "Spoken to another than a friend, they might be construed as treasonable. I admit the apathy of the king, but your censure of it is founded on ignorance. He knew, as I did, that Jeanne was not burned at Rouen. She escaped death and prison. She still lives and is well."

"You have contrived a pleasant fiction to entertain us with, Sire de Retz," said De Metz, with an ironical smile. "It is, however, not a new one, for I have heard it in all forms from the credulous common folk. A learned priest once told me that every nation has its buried champion, whose death the people refuse to credit. These heroes sit in their sepulchres in a living but unbroken sleep, awaiting the hour which fate has decreed for their return in triumph to the rescue of their beloved land. But why should you mock us by this extravagance? The event is still too near, and our hearts too sore to bear the jest."

“Jean de Novelopont, or De Metz,” said the marshal impressively, “listen to me. When the prisoner was led to execution at Rouen, you may remember, any eye-witness will tell you, that her face was hidden from view by an enormous mitre which concealed the greater part of her countenance; and a huge frame covered with insulting phrases was carried before her which completely hid her figure. When the disfiguring flames had done their work, the body was exposed to the view of the populace, to assure them that a woman, unrecognizable then, had really suffered death, so quickly was the conviction spread in every mind that at the last moment Jeanne had escaped her foes. By many this has been maintained, as you have said, from that day to this; but not till La Trémoille fell from power could those in whose hands Jeanne has trusted herself declare the secret, and then only in confidence to a few trusty friends. The hour has not yet come when the truth can be made known to all. Political considerations of the greatest importance forbid her appearance at this time. She must wait until she can receive the welcome of a united France. You need not doubt my information when I tell you that within a year Charles and Philip of Burgundy will meet as brothers. There will be no more talk then of *Dauphinois* or *Bourguignons*. All will be Frenchmen, banded together against a common foe. Then the time will be ripe for Jeanne Darc

to arise, like your buried heroes from their tombs, and lead the way to the final victory over the English, which she often foretold as the end of her mission."

"What a glorious idea!" exclaimed Des Armoises. "Your minstrel must weave that ending into his romance before he gives it to the world."

"Alas, that it should be romance and not truth," said Novelonpont. "If Jeanne were alive, we, her friends, would know it. Her brother would not have died of grief at her loss. She would have found some way to convey the joyful tidings to her stricken family."

De Retz drew himself up haughtily. "You attack my honor, by questioning my word," he said. "You shall see Jeanne Dare and speak to her a twelvemonth hence."

"Are you willing that I should tell the news at once to her unhappy parents?" asked Novelonpont ironically.

"As I have told you, imperative reasons of state demand delay," replied the marshal. "I do not forbid you to reveal what you have heard; but remember that the burden of proof will rest on you, and the ills that result to France, to the king, to Jeanne herself, will be the work of your blundering zeal. She is safe in the hands of friends diplomatic enough to arrange all for her good; men who are deeply conversant with the

politics of the time, who feel the pulse of the nation, who unravel the devious lines of contrary policies and guide them to their end. I have told you this freely as to trusted comrades. I can add no more, but bid you wait patiently, but with hope. When next we meet the Maid may be of our company."

"Will it be within a year?" asked Des Armoises.

"I fancy it will prove so," replied the marshal. "I follow the court or the army; you, I believe, go to Metz; Novelonpont here has a post at Vaucouleurs, where he serves his king and country as collector of imposts. But when Charles and Philip join hands we will meet again, shall we say at Metz, your native town? Ay, let us fix the rendezvous there; a year hence if God wills, — two years it may be, — in Metz, to welcome the Pucelle."

"With all my heart," cried Des Armoises. "I would give all I own to meet that glorious being in the flesh."

"You shall do so at a less price," said De Retz; "but yonder comes a messenger I have been expecting. I will receive him, and return to you again."

He waved his hand in farewell, and strolled to the farther end of the terrace, where, after gazing steadily for a while across the rippling current of the river as if engaged in watching the approach of a boat invisible to the others, he made a turn, and disappeared behind the wing of the château, on that side a mass of ruins.

CHAPTER V.

FAREWELL TO DOMRÉMY.



LEFT alone together, the young men regarded each other seriously, as if divining a possible difference, and girding themselves for the argument.

"If it were true," began Des Armoises, "it would be an atonement for the cruelest injustice that has ever been done to our faith in the ultimate triumph of virtue. It would reconcile me to the possibilities of life."

"It is not true," said Jean de Metz seriously.

"What could be the marshal's object in inventing so serious a deception, and one so easily disproved?" asked Robert.

"I cannot answer for that; but he is like his father, the devil. To speak a lie is easy to him. You do not know the man as I do."

"What evil do you know of him?"

"The sort that is whispered in corners. He is a powerful nobleman and highly connected; he is rich, wellbred, and well educated; he can write Latin like

a priest. He keeps a choir of boys educated in music at his expense for the service of his private chapel, and carries them in his train when he is to be long from home. He endows convents, and gives rich gifts to the church."

"These things are not to his discredit," interposed Robert.

"But," continued De Metz impressively, "they say he has sold his soul to the devil."

Robert laughed heartily, glad of an occasion for merriment; but nothing could move his companion's solemnity.

"I hope you may always be able to laugh," said De Metz. "Most of those who meet him feel the effect of his companionship sooner or later in a misfortune that comes they know not how; but come it does, and from him."

"Pardon me, my friend," said Des Armoises; "but as I lack your previous acquaintance with the subject, I am unable to understand the ideas which may supply you with bridges across the gaps in your logic. As it appears on the surface, your argument has no more force or consistency than an old wife's tale."

"You may ask any who know him," said De Metz. "He is abhorred and feared. They say the vaults of his castles could reveal terrible secrets. He has twice narrowly escaped the accusation of murder."

"How could he escape if guilty?" asked Robert.

"You do not know the state of France, or you would not ask that question," said De Metz. "The great nobles are like robber chieftains. They torture, kill, exact tribute, pillage, and burn. Their own relatives, father or brother, are sometimes starved or poisoned within their walls. People speak of these crimes with bated breath. There is no power to aid when the king is powerless and the church divided. France has slain her Messiah, and she must endure the sword."

"This, indeed, is serious if true," exclaimed Robert; "but it furnishes me with no certain reason for distrusting the marshal's story. I believe that Jeanne Darc lives, that I shall meet her, and vow my sword to her service. That would give an object to my life, which at present it sadly lacks. Did you ever love, De Metz, and suffer betrayal in the midst of your paradise?"

"I love no woman but my sister," replied Novelonpont.

"Then you are invulnerable," said Robert. "Love alone can debase and ensnare the will of a man. Independent of that foolish passion, he is a reasonable being, capable of fulfilling the conditions of his nature, and existing in harmony with the ruling will of the universe."

"You talk oddly for a soldier," said De Metz.

"I am a soldier, as any gentleman of rank must be who has nothing with which to justify his useless existence but his sword. When I return to Metz I suppose I shall marry, raise a family, and become a peaceful citizen in that district. I own a castle at Thichiemont."

"It is near my ancestral place," said De Metz. "My sister is now in Metz at the house of an aunt. I wish that you might see her. Eudeline is as beautiful as an angel."

"Heaven grant I may meet with her," said Robert.

"It is because I trust you that I have named her to you," said De Metz. "I can see that you are different from most young men of your station. You would not wrong a woman."

"No, by Saint Sophia," replied Robert. "Not even to revenge the wrong a woman has done me."

"Eudeline, though not of noble birth, is worthy of the highest alliance," continued Novelonpont. "She has been carefully educated, and will receive a rich dowry from the aunt she lives with."

"God send her a good husband," said Robert. "Seriously, Novelonpont, I have no idea of marriage. I mean to seek this Maid of France, and fight under her leadership. I contrive to enjoy life, for I am young; but I should not feel great concern if I knew

that the next day that dawned was to be my last. There is a deep, unhealed wound within my heart."

"Made by a woman, a woman will be able to heal it," replied De Metz. "But do not count on meeting the Maid of France on this side of the grave. The marshal cannot raise her from the dead. You may be sure that he has some evil purpose to serve in contriving this story."

"The future must settle that question," said Robert. "Do you ride to-morrow back to Vaucouleurs?"

"Yes; and shall be glad of your company so far, if it suits you," replied De Metz. "I will make you welcome as long as you choose in my quarters there, and perhaps in return you will do me the favor to carry a dispatch to my sister."

"With all the pleasure in life," said Robert.

"Then we part to meet in the morning," said De Metz, rising. "Make my excuses to the marshal, if he inquires for me. My spirits suffer from being so long in his company. A night spent beneath the roof that shelters him would be penance to me."

They parted on the river-bank, and Des Armoises returned to the tower, where a comfortable bed was prepared for him. The further events of the evening were somewhat confused in his memory of them, Jean Ribaut's wine proving to be of unusual potency. There was more of David's music, light Provençal love-

songs for the most part; and the marshal, growing genial and expansive, told much gossip of the court. Des Armoises had a vivid recollection of a picture that De Retz had drawn of a new court beauty with wonderful blue eyes and dazzling shoulders, which, following the latest fashion, she exposed with a freedom which shocked the imagination of the young man, trained in the decorous customs of the East. He had listened to a dramatic account of the scene in the Castle of Chinon when La Trémoille was betrayed to his enemies. Gilles de Laval recounted this event with the glee of satisfied hatred.

“The great man was in his bed,” said the marshal, “when Rosnieven and the other Bretons came upon him with drawn swords. Pouf! and Rosnieven ran him through as he would a wild boar caught at an advantage; but the Sire de Beuil interposed. ‘No more,’ he said; ‘my uncle surrenders to me. He is my prisoner. I shall be answerable for his safe conduct.’ So he was packed off to Montrésor under the very eyes of the king, who was in bed in the next room, and kept calling out piteously, ‘Treason! Murder! To the rescue!’ Charles D’Anjou had taken pains there should be no rescue; for the doors were locked on the side towards the post of the guards, and only the outer postern was left open by the contrivance of the governor. Never was a plot so well

devised; and would you believe it? the great man's ribs were so well larded with fat, that the sword thrust that would have been mortal for another did him no harm."

Des Armoises slept late, and awoke from dreams in which Jeanne Darc and Agnes Sorel figured interchangeably, to find himself alone within the tower. The marshal and his company had departed. Upon the deal table, covered with half-emptied flagons and plates, a piece of paper lay with a jewelled dagger thrust through it, directing the eye to these words: "Rather than break your tardy sleep, I leave my farewell unsaid. Accept this dagger as a token of my friendship. Let it be a reminder of my promise and of yours that we shall meet, if God wills, when the Pucelle appears in Metz."

Outside the sunshine was radiant over hill and valley. The peasants were at work in the fields. The smell of the loam freshly turned in the furrow arose from the dewy earth. Near the inn door a company of idlers stood to watch the second departure of the morning. Jean de Metz sat on his horse as motionless as a sentinel on guard. By his orders the Arabian had been saddled and bridled, and stood awaiting its master's coming, which it recognized from afar by tossing its nose with a shrill whinny of welcome.

"I am ready, as I promised," said Jean de Metz in

answer to Robert's apologies, "but I am in no haste. We have the day before us, and I am as easy in the saddle as on a cushioned seat."

Robert protested that he had no other business than to settle his score, which he presently did, refusing the offers of refreshment which Marianne and her husband pressed upon him; and the two young men started on their journey, accompanied by the officious Robin, who bestrode a rawboned horse that he was taking to pasture, and hatless and coatless, without saddle or bridle, he served as their escort till they were well out of the village. The jolting of his steed was emphasized by the uneasy motions of his body, and the position of his elbows alternately raised to the level of his ears and depressed against his sides; but although this interrupted, it did not check the flow of his eloquence. He begged the worshipful gentlemen to remember him if an occasion presented itself when a trusty man was to be sought for; he was conscious of a soul above the drudgeries of his station, and was sure that if his merit were rightly known, he might secure a place as squire or armorer, or even as seneschal of a castle. If Jeanne Darc had lived he had had hopes of rising through her influence.

"I cannot be a priest, like my friend Pierre of Toul, now Ambrose," he continued; "for I have it not in me to master the alphabet. Some men are born with a

taste for letters, others for arms. But why should Pierre rise higher than I? He is nothing better as a man. And that reminds me to inquire of your worship if you happen to know why he went last night at dusk alone in a boat to the island? and why he met the lord marshal there and talked with him?"

Des Armoises declared his ignorance of the fact, which somewhat excited his curiosity. "The marshal left me for a time to welcome a messenger," he said; "it may have been the priest."

"It has an ill look," said Robin; "what message should he have for a great lord? Take my word for it, Father Ambrose has something on his conscience; else why should he wear an iron chain for penance beneath his clothes?"

"Does he so?" asked Robert.

"Ay; I saw it once by chance when he threw off his frock to pull out my cousin's child from the mill-pond, where it was like to drown, — a heavy iron chain that wore the flesh."

"Be sure he is a holy man, who is as far above thy comprehension as the stars of heaven," said De Metz severely. "What does the croaking frog know of the thrush's song?"

Des Armoises was surprised at this imaginative utterance from his silent companion. "You are right, De Metz," he said. "Envy has always a carping tongue.

You will not recommend yourself to either of us by speaking against a man in every way your superior," he added to the open-mouthed Robin. "Take this silver piece for your trouble, and leave us here."

Robin dejectedly obeyed, for he had reached the open field where his errand led him. The gentlemen had not waited to hear the justification of his position which he had at his tongue's end; for they had spurred their horses, and were in a moment beyond the reach of his voice. He watched them pause at the top of a hill and turn to look behind them, as if bidding farewell to Domrémy; then descending on the farther side, they were soon out of sight.

The hostler took the halter from his horse, and watched him as he began eagerly to crop the herbage.

"There is no justice in this world, Dapple," he said. "It is the fault of the stars we are born under. Thou art a raw-boned cart-horse, and can never serve a gentleman as does that pink-nostrilled foreigner, that could not draw a plough or do any useful work, yet is promoted and daintily served. But I do not feel it in me to submit as contentedly as thou dost. Perhaps some happy turn of fortune may place me yet in the position I deserve."

Cherishing these high thoughts, the hostler walked homeward, swinging in his hand the halter, the

release from which Dapple celebrated by rolling over on the grass with all his hoofs set skyward, every ambition satisfied in present contentment, thus illustrating the contrast so pointedly drawn by Robin to prove the innate superiority of man.

CHAPTER VI.

JEANNE DARC LIVES.



SINCE it had first gained the notice of the world, Domrémy had been swept at various times by tidal waves of emotion, and the souls of its inhabitants bore traces of the experiences they had gone through, as rocks show the course of prehistoric glaciers. Sensitive natures like Jacques Darc were crushed and overwhelmed; others like Father Ambrose developed a tendency to religious ecstasy; but the greater number proved themselves as hard and coarse as they had been before, but with a new greed for sensation, and an overweening sense of their own importance which made the gossip of the village firesides, and especially of the inn at Greux, the chief relish of their lives.

The news of the outside world was full of interest during the two years succeeding the visit of the Marshal de Retz. The treaty of Arras, which reconciled Burgundians and Dauphinois, and put an end to the long civil war, was celebrated with rejoicings in Lor-

raine and Champagne, as it was in all the provinces of France. None but statesmen grumbled that the king had bought peace with Duke Philip at too high a price by humiliating concessions and great sacrifice of estates and treasures. Now that France was united, the English would soon be driven from the land; and when in the spring of 1436 Paris opened her gates to the representatives of her lawful sovereign, the people remembered the promise of Jeanne Darc that "a greater gage than Orleans" should be given to the king.

At the time of the Council of Arras the Duke of Bedford died in the castle of Rouen, where his victim, the Maid of France, had suffered the agony of her imprisonment. Isabel of Bavaria, too, died in poverty and humiliation; and it was recalled that it was she who had shamefully fulfilled the first clause of the prophecy, "A woman shall betray France, and a maid shall save it."

Thus the thought of Jeanne Darc was in the air. In the hour of triumph the heart of France turned with yearning to the memory of its Messiah; and as if in answer to the appeal, there came the report, sounded first in Lorraine, and echoed with tumultuous joy in Orleans, "Jeanne Darc lives! Another suffered in her place at Rouen."

To the circle about Jean Ribaut's hearth, these

tidings brought an intense excitement, which surpassed all previous sensations; but it was news of a sort which could not be discussed within four walls. Those who heard it rushed into the open air to tell it to the first they met, and to inquire for more assurance of its truth.

No less a messenger than Jean du Lis had brought the news from Vaucouleurs; and he stood in the market-place of Domrémy, his horse white with foam and spent with fatigue, the centre of an eager crowd, to whom he found it impossible to utter another word than his first breathless declaration.

His brother Pierre led him aside, and drew from him what he knew of this amazing piece of fortune, too strange to be true, yet too well authenticated to be denied. There were those who had seen Jeanne and had spoken to her; and she had sent word to her brothers to meet her in the city of Metz, where she was at present residing.

With the brothers, the most important consideration was the need of communicating the news to their mother. Pierre would have kept it from her, fearing the shock of so great a joy, and full of uneasy doubts as to the truth of the matter; but the clamorous rejoicing of the populace was not to be restrained. Robin climbed into the belfry of the church and rang the bell, which had been given by

the Duke of Lorraine as a memorial to Jeanne, so loudly and wildly that Isabel flung her door open to inquire the cause of the commotion.

Jean and Pierre hastened into the cottage, followed by the curious eyes of all Domrémy. Those who pressed nearest to the door heard a muffled shriek; and Marianne Ribaut, from a point of vantage on an overturned tub by the casement window, called out in an agitated whisper, "She's fallen in a faint, and they are undoing her bodice, and dashing water in her face; but old Jacques sits still in his chair by the fire, and does not look nor listen. The house might fall about his ears, and he would not heed it."

Pierre shut the casement, and excluded all but the nearest relatives, who could not be denied. Durand Laxart, his uncle, frantic with joy, had followed Jean to reinforce his statement. Jeanne Aubery, the god-mother of Jeanne Darc, and Aveline Voyseul, Isabel's sister, had left their household work undone to share the rejoicing of the family of Darc as they had shared its mourning.

Isabel lay white and motionless upon the bed where they had placed her; but her eyes turned eagerly upon each speaker, the group sitting, as she insisted, close beside her, so that she could catch every word that was spoken. Little by little excitement overcame her

dizzy faintness; and she rose with Jean's help, and resumed her accustomed seat by the hearth, where Jacques had remained all the while in silent quiescence.

Isabel cast a scornful glance at the bowed figure of her husband. "He knows nothing of what passes," she said; "well, let him be. It may be best for him. I thought my heart would burst when Jean told me; and Pierre said, 'Mother, take it quietly. It may not be true;' and with that I fell like a stone. How could you say that, Pierre? It must be true."

"Yes, yes," cried Durand Laxart, "my girl, my own good Jeanne, would have escaped the flames if there was a God in heaven. I once told Father Fulbert that since her death I had no more belief left in me than a heathen; and he bade me think of all the martyrs, and do penance for my doubt."

"It can be easily determined," said Aveline. "Jean and Pierre must set out at once for Metz, and bring Jeanne home; or if she is too busy in the wars to come to us, bring back word how she does and what she says."

"You will go, will you not, Pierre?" cried Isabel.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I will go at once, and make proof of the truth of the matter with my own eyes."

"And I also," said Jean; "not that there is room for doubt, but we must have word from Jeanne's own mouth of all that has passed."

“What are ye chattering about, idle varlets,” said old Jacques, looking up suddenly from his revery. “There are the cows to be milked, and the sheep to be tended. No one works now-a-days. All goes uncared for. It was not so when I was able to be about. Then there was a rod for the back of the slothful, and he who idled at his task went without supper. To work, to work, every one of you.” Saying this with a threatening glance about the circle, he leaned his chin upon his hands, which were folded upon the top of his staff, and relapsed once more into silence.

“There is a wreck of a man,” said Jeanne Aubery. “Yet my brother is ten years younger than I, and I never thought to live to see him like this. But ever since Jeanne’s death he has failed,—ah, what am I saying? Jeanne is not dead. How do you make it out, Isabeau? It wearies my poor old brains to puzzle over it. If my namesake and god-daughter, Jeanne Dare, is alive and in the flesh, how comes it that her father is but a senseless dotard with grief at her loss, and your fine son Jacques is dead of sorrow?”

“Oh, it is cruel,” cried Isabel with a sudden wail, “to think that Jacques need not have died. Oh, Jean, think of that. Why was it so? Why could we not have known? In all these five years was there no

way thy sister could have sent us word, only a word or a token to let us know the truth? Reproach her with that when you meet her, Jean, and let her know that we cannot take it kindly that she let us be so deceived."

"A pack of silly women," muttered Durand Laxart; "you would blame Jeanne for what you have suffered when she herself has suffered tenfold. No doubt she has been kept strict prisoner these five years, with no way given her by which she could send the smallest token to her friends, unless she could get a bird of the air to carry it. I know my Jeanne's loyal heart and her courage. Fear of death would not keep her from ye if she had been free."

"Tis true!" cried Isabel. "God's judgment light on those who have so injured her. Who were they, according to your opinion, Durand?"

"Only a wise man can unravel the politics of this sad time; but a guess may hit the mark," he answered. "The Duke of Bedford has but lately died in the castle of Rouen, and at the same time Jeanne is returned to us. You can put two and two together as well as I."

Durand's position in the family was that of an oracle on all questions too high or too deep for common minds; since it was he who had believed in Jeanne when all others doubted, and he had been the direct

instrument of her success. Even Pierre, who had fought beside his sister in the wars, and had been made prisoner with her before the gates of Compiègne, was considered inferior to his uncle in the retrospective judgment of the affairs in which he had borne an active part.

After Durand's answer the three women sat silent, as if they found the subject beyond them. Pierre and Jean were talking together apart from the rest. Presently Isabel rose with tremulous energy, and began to make preparations for her sons' departure

"You will take Jeanne some of my potted cheese," she said; "and I wish you might carry her some of the honey mead they make so well at the convent on the hill. To be sure, she was never one to eat or drink; dry bread or black pudding was all the same to her; and on Fridays in Lent I had much ado to make her swallow enough for health. If it were Catherine, now, she would wish for the best in the house. I remember how she made our mouths water with stories of the Duke's table, — roast peacocks and herons, soups of all kinds, pears and grapes and Orleans marmalade, with spiced wine as free as water. She was always one to enjoy herself." The mother heaved a sigh of regret, and wiped a tear with the corner of her apron. "Now that I have Jeanne back, it seems as if I must have the others, Catherine and Jacques, to rejoice with me," she added.

“Surely, sister, you can’t expect miracles to be done for you alone,” said Aveline scornfully. “I’ve buried three children, and not one has come back to me.”

“Those who have much want more,” said Durand. “Isabeau can never realize how the matter stands in the eyes of the world. Who cares for Catherine or Jacques except the few who have known them? All France welcomes Jeanne Darc, and all England trembles before her.”

Against the rhetoric of this speech Isabel was powerless. She continued packing a small chest with the best offerings which affection could suggest, feeling a bewildered sense of her own insignificance as compared with the glory and greatness of her child.

When, on the following day, her sons set out on their journey, the yearning of the mother’s heart eclipsed all other considerations. She clung to Jean’s hand, detaining him while she gave him a dozen messages to deliver. “Wait, wait, Jean!” she cried. “Tell her I must see her. I will walk barefoot to Metz, if only I can see her. Why did I not plan to go with you? It is I who should be the first to meet my child. Tell her I must come to her, or she must come to me. Make her return with you, Pierre. Do not leave her in peace till she promises to come to me first of all.”

Father Fulbert stopped the brothers at the church door to give them his blessing, with his palsied hands

laid upon their heads as they knelt before him. Tears streamed from the old man's eyes.

"Tell Jeanne that I am going fast," he said; "and that I can depart in peace and joy like Simeon if my eyes may behold her once more before I die."

Half the population of the villages followed the two as they started on their way. Robin remained until the last, walking by Pierre's side as he rode slowly to accept the farewell greetings of his friends.

"All happens by the will of God," said Robin. "One is taken and another is left. You are noble gentlemen, who will share half the estates of France with your illustrious sister now she's alive and come to her own again. The king in gratitude can do no less than make you dukes and princes or marshals of France, while I must remain as hostler at Greux. If you find there is a vacant place as chamberlain or seneschal, or any station that is dignified and with good emoluments, I beg you'll use your influence to get it for me, for old times' sake."

Jean laughed good-humoredly. "Our greatness is still in the clouds," he said.

"I wish I might be as sure of my supper every day as you are of the king's good-will," said Robin; "then I might sit down and fold my hands. Farewell, Jean and Pierre. Remind your sister that once when she was a child I carried her over a brook

that she need not wet her feet. For that I think she should in gratitude give me a place as governor of a castle."

When the brothers had ridden onward and were out of sight, Robin muttered to himself, "It was Catherine, not Jeanne, I carried over the brook. No matter, if the story will serve its turn. I would have done it as willingly for Jeanne, though she was always shy, and held herself apart. Well, Robin, thou hast not yet come into a fortune. The day's work is still undone, and I'll wager that by this time the pigs have broken again into the barley-field. Mistress will be in a rage. Well, I would risk more than that for a good fat place at court, where I could serve the king by eating and drinking."

"Thank God we are rid of that chattering fool," said Pierre, when their road turned from the village and plunged into the forest. As he spoke, he bared his head to the breeze, which stirred the hoary branches of the oaks and set their young leaves quivering. The sunbeams, slanting among the roughened boles of ancient trees and the slim saplings ranged between, sent broken shafts of light across the road. The horses' hoofs on the soft wet earth made hardly noise enough to scare the wild creatures of the wood that peeped and rustled in leafy coverts. The freedom of the wilderness, and the exuberant vitality

of the springtime, touched Pierre's spirit with a sympathetic exhilaration, and relaxed the strain of his nerves.

"I am glad we are on our way," he said. "I have not eaten nor slept since we heard the news. No wonder my mother frets her life out, shut up within the four walls of her home. Give me action and movement, a horse and a sword, and the world before me, and I can endure everything."

"You talk as if our errand were not a joyful one," said Jean.

Pierre shrugged his shoulders.

"It's a fool's errand most likely," he said; "but who is that strange figure waiting yonder at the cross-roads? It reminds me of the picture of Death on horseback."

The junction of four roads was marked by a way-side shrine. A crucifix, roughly designed and crudely painted, rose out of the violets and grasses into the transparent air, crossed by bird flights and darting butterflies. It set itself as a contradiction to the scene about it, for nature teaches no heavenly truth; but the figure on horseback was even more a discordance and a blot on the landscape.

Death could hardly look more pale and gaunt than the human form whose vitality was attested by the glowing eyes sunk in hollow sockets, and shaded by

the cowl of a friar's mantle. The hands that held the bridle were emaciated and transparently white.

"It is Father Ambrose," said Jean in surprise; and both young men mechanically crossed themselves.

The two years succeeding the village festival when he had addressed the people of Domrémy had brought to Father Ambrose popularity in such a sort that he had been obliged to withdraw from public contact in order to escape its inconvenient manifestations. The report of his asceticism, and the intolerable penances which he set himself to perform, had gained him the commendation of the Archbishop of Toul, and the offer of the richest charge within his diocese. When the young priest chose instead a hermitage in an inaccessible wilderness, the people of Greux were content to be pastorless that they might have the honor of claiming for their nominal head a saint whose occasional presence at the high festivals of the church lent them a fervor of mystical devotion.

Ambrose of Greux bade fair to rival Jeanne of Domrémy. A miraculous power was claimed for his touch. Stories of his visions obtained currency in distant provinces.

When the brothers came up with him they saluted the priest respectfully, and he returned the greeting with a smile. The sudden illumination of his face

gave it for the time a likeness to his former self; and the tones of his voice had the old melody as he said, "If my company is welcome, I will join you on your journey."

"What! you will go to Metz?" exclaimed Pierre.

"Yes. To welcome your sister."

"You believe, then, that it is Jeanne? The event seems credible to you?" urged Pierre, anxious to silence his own doubts by another's assurance.

Father Ambrose evaded a direct reply. "When we arrive at Toul, I shall receive special dispatches, the contents of which I will make known to you," he said. "They relate to the history and present prospects of Jeanne du Lis, your sister."

"By Saint Rémi, that name sounds odd in my ears," cried Pierre. "The world will not know Jeanne Dare under the new title which she long ago refused."

"Times are changed," answered Father Ambrose. "You will greet her by the new name."

"But what is your opinion of the matter, father?" asked Jean. "What is your explanation of her long silence and sudden reappearance?"

"When we leave Toul, I will tell you all that I know," he answered. "Till then conjecture is useless. Let us defer the discussion of the subject."

With this the brothers were forced to content themselves; and the three journeyed amicably together dur-

ing the day, the priest proving a pleasant companion. He showed an almost childish interest in the scenes about him, and a modest desire to win the confidence of his fellow travellers, not as their spiritual superior, but as one of their own age and station thrown by chance into a temporary intimacy with them.

Something of the whimsical humor of Pierre of Toul appeared in his conversation, chastened and refined by the experiences through which he had passed as through the flame of a furnace.

Jean and Pierre could not forget that this young man of their own age was reported to bear at times on his person the stigmata that marked his likeness to the crucified Christ. They could not throw off their awe of him, unbend as he might in encouragement of their friendship. If in the course of conversation an oath slipped from Pierre's lips, he felt the rebuke which Ambrose failed to administer even by a look. Jean was conscious of derelictions of principle which never troubled his conscience except at the Eastertide confession when he prepared for the Mass.

When at nightfall they made a resting-place in the forest, Father Ambrose having stipulated that the stages of their journey should be arranged in avoidance of towns or hostelries, the brothers lay awake in awe-stricken silence, aware that their companion, who had retired to a distance, was keeping a vigil of prayer, and

accompanying his confessions by the use of the flagellant's whip.

"Horrible !" whispered Pierre. "I wonder how many strokes I should have to give myself to square the account with my conscience, if such a holy man deserves so much."

A sunny morning brought them within sight of Toul. Its housetops and chimneys and the spires of its cathedral were visible from a distance; and Ambrose, leaning forward in the saddle, gazed with a strained vision.

"It gleams in the sun like the city of the New Jerusalem," he murmured. "Just so I saw it years ago when I rode in the pride of youth along this path with Jeanne Dare at my side." He pressed his hand upon his heart with a gentle sigh. The brothers could not know that with the movement three needle-shaped points entered the flesh.

"Thank God! we shall soon reach a tavern," said Pierre. "The heat and dust have dried my throat into a condition of intolerable thirst. Hasten on, Jean, to the Golden Lion just within the gates, and bespeak the best in the house in advance of our coming. My horse has cast a shoe, and you must find me a farrier. Meantime I must travel slowly along these cursed stony cart tracks."

"Your orders, noble knight, shall be obeyed," said

Jean, in ironical submission. "My brother," he added, "presumes on his dignity. He is a belted knight; and I, two years his senior, must hold his stirrup as his squire. It is another instance of the inequalities of fortune of which Robin so justly complains. What errand shall I do for you, father, in the city?"

"I was about to give you a commission," said the priest. "I do not mean to enter the gates. Go to the palace of the archdeacon near the cathedral, and inquire for a packet bearing the seal of the Marshal de Retz, and addressed to Ambrose of Greux. It will be handed you without question, if you show this cross as a token." He detached a silver crucifix from his girdle as he spoke.

"Must we leave you alone?" asked Pierre, though reluctant to relinquish his visions of a comfortable seat at an inn table with a trim damsel in attendance.

"I will seek a seat in the shade and await you here," replied the priest. "I have a scanty mess of oats for my horse left in the saddlebag. He can better his dinner by cropping the grass along the road. I want no food myself, for it is a fast to-day. Be as leisurely as you please. There is no haste in our journey. But bring me the packet with all care and safety."

Jean promised; and the brothers took leave, Jean

riding in haste, while Pierre followed at the easy and dignified gait which became a knight.

Left alone, Ambrose carefully fed his horse, led him to drink at a brook, and tethered him by the roadside; then he sought a secluded spot within the grove that bordered the highway, where he flung himself upon the grass at the foot of a wide-spreading chestnut-tree.

The relaxation of his weary muscles was such a solace that at first the priest's overstrained scruples were ready to oppose the indulgence; but tired nature asserted its claims, and he remained passive, his mind alone alert with the pitiless energy of accusing thought.

Birds fluttered from bough to bough within reach of his hand. Squirrels darted near him, unmindful of his presence. Through the fresh green of the foliage he watched the fleecy clouds sailing from one blue haven to another driven by a celestial impulse.

"All moves by the will of God," he said, "except the motions of a man's soul. A hurricane may darken the heavens, the creatures of the wood may perish; but on the morrow the sky smiles again, and the joy of earth renews itself. Only in the heart does every storm of passion leave irremediable ruin behind."

He groaned, and laid his aching head closer to the earth.

“O Mother Earth, would I were the simplest of thy offspring, part of the teeming life which thou dost bring forth and nourish for the life of a moment, a gnat, a droning fly, a cobweb, a mote in the sunbeam, and then nothing forevermore. Oh, the sweetness of oblivion, the sinking into and being ingulfed by that vast ocean, thought at rest, soul and body liberated, hell’s torments and heaven’s joys alike indifferent.—Sinful thoughts, to be added to my load of sin.”

He groaned, and then lay silent with closed eyes. In a moment he was in the spirit, entranced above time and place.

He was in the midst of a vast sea of light, part of which came from above and was heatless and lambent as moonshine, but with a greater brilliancy; and part from below, with the glare and scorching breath of a furnace. After a time he was able to discern the shapes of the blessed above, and far beneath, the forms of those who writhed in the flames of hell. He avoided the sight of the latter, and turned his eyes heavenward, but without discerning more than dim outlines of those who walked in a radiance that dazzled his eyes and prevented his seeing any object clearly.

Soon he was aware that the level where he stood stretched out in a billowy surface like the tops of

summer clouds; and at his feet he saw a number of men and women wrapped in white garments like grave-clothes, and lying motionless in slumber except for the regular breathing, which was like that of a child in its cradle.

“Who are these?” he asked; and a familiar presence answered, “They are those who have lost heaven because they have sinned, yet have not deserved punishment because they gave themselves for others. They sleep, and know not grief nor pain. They will awake only at the judgment.”

“And after that?” he cried.

“They will be blown out like the flame of a candle,” said the voice.

Ambrose felt his tears upon his cheeks. “It is what I have prayed for,” he said. “But oh, Jeanne, I hear your voice! Why can I no longer see your face in visions?”

“The heavenly vision is not for those who sleep,” was the answer.

Ambrose awoke. The dull light of day was about him. The dusty road stretched like a white chalk-mark between the fence rows and thickets; and along it a line of pack-mules were being driven, laden with merchandise, while their owners filled the air with noisy talk, oaths, and idle songs.

He was conscious of an overpowering craving for

food. The scattered oats in the bottom of the saddle-bag tempted him. The sight of a coarse wheaten loaf, broken and munched by a couple of children who were carrying bundles of fagots, filled him with physical longing.

"I can resist no longer," he said; "my fast may well end at noon;" and he gave one of the children a piece of money for the half of the loaf which remained. This he ate with a voracity which shamed his delicacy.

"We are beasts on one side of our nature, fallen angels on the other," he said, preparing to saddle his horse.

A company of ladies and gentlemen returning from a hunt rode by, and stared at the lonely priest with a disordered cowl and a bridle hung over his arm.

"Too much drinking in taverns, good father, has inconveniently approximated your vespers and matins," called out one of the party; and the ladies laughed at the witticism, as they rode on and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

CHAPTER VII.

FATHER AMBROSE'S CONFESSION.



EAN and Pierre returned from the city early in the afternoon, and the travellers pursued their way until sunset, when they halted for the night in a spot which Ambrose had selected for their bivouac. Every road and byway within a day's journey of Toul was familiar to him; and his thoughts had dwelt from the start upon a certain sloping hillside bounded by a brook which crossed the road to fall into a mill-pond and turn a creaking wheel.

Only this noise betrayed the neighborhood of human industry; but from a turning in the path where the trees receded to form an open glade, a distant view of Toul could be had.

"This is a place which I have loved from childhood," said Ambrose. "It is connected with many of the important events of my life, if thoughts and emotions, and moods of intense feeling, are to be accounted events. I have chosen it, therefore, as

the scene of a confession which I am to make to you."

"You confess to us!" cried Jean and Pierre in a breath; and the former added, "When I got the packet from the archdeacon, he came himself to put it into my hands, and asked me more than a dozen times where the holy Ambrose was to be found, and why he did not come himself to the palace that he and my lord bishop and the rest might kiss his robe and ask his blessing."

Ambrose looked up in frowning protest. "The journey I take is not for my honor," he said. "After this day there will be two upon earth, Pierre and Jean du Lis, who know me as I am, a lost and miserable sinner."

His listeners stared aghast.

"Sit down at ease," he said: "the story is a long one, and how hard to put into words, God only knows. I must tell you that as men judge, I have committed no mortal sin, no act of villainy, no premeditated crime. Penance and prayer have absolved me from the faults of a wild and headstrong youth. They are not those that most vex my conscience. But errors of judgment, weaknesses of will, the idolatries of self-seeking, may plunge a man into the lowest hell before he knows his danger. Promise me that you will listen in silence, and that you will not quit this spot till I give you leave."

The brothers promised, full of an awe-struck curiosity.

"All the world knows that I loved Jeanne Dare, and sought to wed her against her will and contrary to her vow," began Ambrose. "For that sin I do daily penance; but two only know that after her death I loved and sought to wed her sister Catherine."

Jean and Pierre started with exclamations of surprise.

"It is a shameful thing," continued Ambrose in a monotonous voice, "to so soon replace one affection by another, yet men have done it without shame. It was my fate to be forever at odds with the ordinary conditions of life. First I must set my passion at war with Jeanne's vow, and suffer defeat and God's judgment against me. Next I must discover that I loved Catherine more madly than ever I loved Jeanne, only after I had adopted the robe of a novice, and promised myself to the priesthood."

He paused, and drew his hand across his brow where drops of sweat were starting. The condemnation which he knew to await each disclosure was torture to his sensitive spirit. He did not dare to meet the eyes that watched him now with the keenness of aroused personal consciousness foreseeing an affront.

"Catherine was like Jeanne in looks," he continued; "almost her very image; but in her ways she was

a being of another world. She had learned many of the arts of the great ladies at Nancy; and she practiced them on me, on Robin at the inn, on any man that crossed her path, but all with dignity and high disdain, as who should say, 'You may love me from afar.' This is a challenge to a man's spirit, if he be such a man as I was. I followed her to Nancy, exchanging my monkish habit for the richest suit I could afford. I hung about the castle, cringed, sued, suffered rebuffs, to be rewarded sometimes by a meeting when she could steal a moment from her task; but she would at no time give me any other assurance of her affection than the doubtful declaration that if I had not been born the son of a cobbler she might have cared for me. Meantime my pursuit of the duchess's waiting-maid was talked about among the servants, until it reached the ears of the guests of the castle; and in an unlucky hour this idle chatter drew upon Catherine the notice of a nobleman who had come on a mission for the king to Duke Charles. This was the Marshal de Retz, whom you have seen.

"Catherine told me that he had declared to her that she was the very likeness of her sister Jeanne, in whose company he had entered Orleans; and for the sake of Jeanne's memory he had offered her a place to attend upon his wife at a high salary if she

would leave Nancy, and go with him to Brittany. I warned her what such offers might mean, and she promised not to listen to them.

“One morning Catherine was missing. It was reported that she was drowned in the river. I went to the marshal, and accused him openly of some villainy. He laughed at me, and ordered me home to my convent. Later he came to me in secret, and told me a story stranger than my wildest imaginings. I refused to credit him; and he left me in anger, promising that some day I would be glad to act as his coadjutor. He threatened at the same time that if I revealed his connection with the affair he would accuse me of Catherine’s murder, bringing one of his servants to witness that I had been seen with her near the river on the day of her disappearance. I went home to Domrémy stricken at heart. I became a priest. I mortified the flesh. I lived as you know. But Catherine’s fate was never for a moment absent from my thoughts.

“On the day of the May festival I once more saw the Marshal de Retz; and that night I talked with him in secret; and again he told me of the plan by which he meant to secure the king’s renown, France’s glory, his own reputation, and deliverance from pressing charges devised by his enemies for his discredit. All this was to be accomplished, as you may have guessed, by the

substitution of Catherine Darc in the place and with the character of her sister Jeanne."

Pierre sprang to his feet with a mighty oath.

"Patience," urged Ambrose. "Let me finish uninterrupted as you promised. The marshal swore to me upon the most sacred relics that Catherine's position while in his castle had been that of an honored guest; and that during the two years which she had spent in a convent, she had been treated with the distinction that would have been accorded to Jeanne herself. The dispatches which awaited me in Toul announce the appearance of the false Jeanne at Metz."

He unrolled the sheets of manuscript, and translated from the Latin in which language they were written, the following sentences: "It is necessary that the brothers of Jeanne should openly acknowledge her. No skepticism could oppose itself to such a triumphant vindication of her claims."

"Death and damnation!" cried Pierre. "Do you expect us to lend ourselves to such a dishonorable scheme? No, by Saint Rémi; a thousand times no. I will denounce the imposture and the authors of it. The marshal shall answer before the highest court in the realm for his detention of my sister these two years against her will."

"Listen," said Ambrose. "The marshal is a man who stops at nothing. He writes that a company of

soldiers are to lie in ambush on our road to Metz, and that we pass safely only on my giving the signal agreed upon in the event of your acquiescence."

"Your warning defeats his purpose," said Pierre with a harsh laugh. "We need not continue our journey to Metz."

"Moreover," added Ambrose, "he declares that your sister's safety is contingent upon your decision."

"That is a straw in the balance against my honor," said Pierre.

"Why, no honor is lost, if we welcome Catherine as our sister," said Jean. "She is surely that; and right glad I should be to see her again. I loved her as well as Jeanne; better, perhaps. We owe it to her to deliver her from the power of this wicked man."

"That we shall do by rousing all France to help us cry shame upon the marshal," said Pierre.

"You will not live to do it," said Ambrose. "He threatens more than I have told."

"Perhaps he has hired you to put poison in our meat and drink," said Pierre. "Since you speak as his mouthpiece, you are no doubt in all things his willing tool."

"Willing?" said Ambrose, "ah, how unwilling; but I bow to the power of necessity. My own honor, happiness, salvation even, must be imperilled to pay the debt I owe to Catherine."

"Be reasonable, Pierre," urged Jean. "Consider if you have a right to plunge our mother into further distress."

"Why, what would you have me do?" asked Pierre, turning angrily upon his brother.

"Wait, and be patient," answered Jean. "At any moment it will be in our power to expose the marshal's design; and we can do this the better when we are more familiar with his plans. It will not do to oppose our ignorance to his settled purpose. That would be to fight unarmed, and in the dark; but if by appearing to yield, we throw him off his guard, we shall be in a better position to attack him later."

"You forget," said Pierre, with scornful emphasis, "that you speak in the hearing of a hired spy, who is ready to deliver our lives into the marshal's hands."

"I deserve your scorn, but not your suspicion," said Ambrose meekly. "It is not for money that I risk my soul. Catherine's happiness is the sole object of my life. I am the unhappy cause of every hour of grief that she has suffered. No reparation is too great for me to make."

"We owe her something also, do we not?" asked Jean, "and something to our mother, who would die from such a disappointment."

Pierre strode up and down in moody reflection.

"Say what you may, I cannot tarnish my honor as a knight and a man by descending to the infamy to which our friend the priest finds it easy to reconcile his conscience," he declared.

Ambrose sighed heavily. "I struggled with all the power of my soul," he said. "If there were a way of escape I should have found it."

"A priest is only half a man," said Pierre. "It was a soldier who cut the knot that no one else could undo. Because you are frightened by this man's threats I need not be."

"You do not know the marshal," said Ambrose wearily. "No one whose heart is pure can realize the depths of evil of which the human soul is capable, or the strength of Satan's hosts when they are opposed only by the feeble will of man."

"Of what use are your prayers?" asked Pierre tauntingly. "If they cannot help you, the offices of the church must be a mockery."

"Spare me," pleaded Ambrose. "Do not make my sin an argument against the estate from which I have fallen. Let not man's evil cast discredit upon God's goodness. 'For thou continuest holy, O thou Worship of Israel.'"

He raised his eyes, while his wan face shone for the moment with a light of self-forgetful devotion.

"You are a strange man, Ambrose," said Pierre.

"I know not whether you are a saint or a devil. Tell me what you mean to do in Metz."

"I shall devote my life to the service of Jeanne du Lis," he replied. "Catherine Darc will be known henceforth by that name. I will be her friend, counsellor, and spiritual adviser. The remorse that she might suffer shall be mine. I will do penance to atone for her fault against the truth."

"But are you so dull as to fancy that this absurd imposture can for a moment succeed?" asked Pierre; "not one in ten will be deceived by a false Jeanne Darc."

"Then mine shall be the infamy of detection when it comes," said Ambrose. "She must not be blamed except as the tool of others. I will stand between her and all the ills of her strange, unnatural position."

"You love her still, false priest that you are," cried Pierre.

"Ah, not in the old way," answered Ambrose. "The fires of earthly passion will never again burn in the dead cinder that is my heart. I love her as a father does his child."

Pierre disdained further conversation, and retiring to a distance he wrapped himself in his cloak, and slept or pretended slumber; while Jean, full of a restless curiosity, asked the priest a hundred questions concerning the strange events which he had related.

Ambrose submitted to the interrogation, but his answers were vague and unsatisfying. Like Pierre, he was absorbed by a secret preoccupation; and soon he excused himself, and stole away into the deeper recesses of the woods.

"Pierre," said Jean, flinging himself down beside his brother, "tell me what you are plotting and planning so silently. What is it you mean to do?"

Pierre raised himself upon his elbow, and placed his mouth close to his brother's ear.

"I shall have revenge upon the Marshal de Retz," he answered, "and rather than allow Jeanne's fame to suffer traducing, I will kill Catherine with my own hands."

"That would be to choose one evil for another," replied Jean. "How would it serve Jeanne's fame if the noble knight, Pierre du Lis, should be executed as a murderer, after exposing his sister as an impostor, and bringing eternal infamy upon his name and hers?"

Pierre sighed impatiently, but made no reply.

"I have no sympathy for those who run full tilt at everything that opposes their fancy, like a mad bull at a rag," said Jean. "A wise man takes the world as he finds it. Let Catherine and the marshal divide between them the guilt of the imposture; and let it be our part to save what vestige of credit

there may remain to our family out of a ruinous situation."

"To palter with disgrace is to share it," said Pierre.

"It is not disgrace, if known only to yourself," answered Jean. "At present the country is ringing with Jeanne's praises. The tide of popular favor runs so strong that it will force the Pope to grant reparation for the church's sentence against her, and rehabilitation of her fame. A living Jeanne will have more power than a dead one. If sentence was not executed against her, it was because it was not rightly confirmed, so it will seem. As for the result of the matter, leave it to those who are responsible for it. We need not meddle with it."

"The result will be shame and dishonor, reason it how you will," groaned Pierre.

"I do not know that," said Jean. "Let us hope for the best."

"There have been pretenders known before in the world's history," said Pierre, "but never one that was not exposed."

"Do not, at any rate, hasten the inevitable," replied Jean. "A good knight bides his time, and does nothing with a rashness that offers advantage to the enemy."

"Your voice is like that of the tempter in my ears," cried Pierre impatiently. "Take yourself off, and leave me in peace."

“Not until you promise me to be prudent,” answered his brother. “Acknowledge the false Jeanne as your sister, and await the result.”

Pierre muttered an oath, pulled his hat over his eyes, buried his head upon his arms, and remained silent.

“Peace to your dreams,” said Jean. “I will go bid Father Ambrose pray that you may be led into a more reasonable state of mind.”

CHAPTER VIII.

RECOGNITION.



RLEANS was in a tumult of rejoicing; and, jealous that Metz should first enjoy the honor of Jeanne's presence, sent *poursuivants* in hot haste to urge her immediate return to the city which cherished the most intense devotion to her memory, and where the news of her reappearance had awakened boundless enthusiasm. In the churches throngs of worshippers gave thanks for the marvellous deliverance wrought by the hand of God. Work was suspended throughout the city; and the doors of the chamber where the council held protracted meetings were besieged by eager crowds seeking information, which none could give, as to the particulars of the wonderful event.

In other cities of France triumphal processions and services of rejoicing were held. The soldiers in camp and field once more felt themselves invulnerable, as if led by the sheltering pillar of fire, which on the side of their enemies became a cloud of darkness.

The English felt the sudden presage of defeat which had so often seized them with panic fear when they had beheld in the distance the gleaming banner of the Maid.

La Trémoille, in his exile, learned of Jeanne's resurrection, and felt that he had not yet known the keenest irony of fate.

Jean de Ligny heard the news; and in the depths of his recreant soul he hoped it might be true, and that the stain upon his name might henceforth be forgotten.

Richemont and Dunois and other honest hearts rejoiced.

La Hire, the *Ecorcheur*, soldier and marauder, swore one of his furious oaths to prove his satisfaction.

What Charles, the king, thought and felt when the tidings reached his ears, none knew unless it were the Marshal de Retz who carried the news to Loches. The king was busily engaged in designing a new parterre for his castle. He talked much of landscape gardening. Duke René had lately sent him a dozen new varieties of roses.

Queen Yolande received the report with pleasure, though she wondered what would be the result of a new element introduced at this time into the maze of court policy. Agnes Sorel protested with lively gratification that the miracle had been wrought for her especial benefit, since it had always seemed to her

that she had lost the three best years of her life by coming to court too late to meet the heroine of France. She sent Jeanne a medal which had hung upon her own white neck; and the dowager of Sicily sent a golden chain. Queen Marie, like her husband, committed herself to nothing; but, as usual, no one thought to ask her opinion.

De Retz was content that the king had given him a full-blown rose as a token of favor. Charles D'Anjou, in evidence of a happy turn in his fortunes, showed the marshal an accusatory letter from the Bishop of Nantes in regard to the crimes of the Sire de Retz, including the mention of a forced entry of one of his churches.

De Retz made answer by tearing the letter to fragments; and the prince laughingly protested that it was the easiest way to answer it.

Thus the marshal, by a daring which surpassed another's dreams, justified himself by that most potent argument, success, and fortified himself against his enemies.

In Metz, all went well for him. The free city, which owed nothing to king or emperor, showed itself a generous host, and lavished honors upon the guest whose presence was a distinction. Splendid banquets were given to Jeanne du Lis; shows and pageants, mock combats and mysteries, were arranged as if for the entertainment of a royal visitor. The Duchess of

Luxembourg, anxious to remove the stigma from that name, sent a pressing invitation to the Maid of Orleans to visit her in her castle of Arlon. Nobles and princes vied with each other for the honor of her acquaintance. Gifts were lavished upon her; and a frenzy of popular enthusiasm greeted the Maid wherever she showed herself.

One bright May morning a pushing, hurrying throng — horsemen, armed soldiers, dusty pedestrians, dashing knights, ladies in litters or on pillions, barefooted friars, children, prelates of the church on ambling palfries, street beggars, mountebanks, the whole population, it would seem, of the city of Metz — discharged itself in a constant stream from the eastern gate of the city; and passing under the guns of the frowning fortress which protected the district on this side, took their way along the highroad in the direction of the village of Marville.

A contagious enthusiasm was in the air. Under its impulse the heterogeneous multitude moved as one body.

“Jeanne du Lis is to meet her brothers to-day at Marville.” This was the rumor that set the crowd in motion. It was not only an occasion to satisfy the curious, but many worthy people had appealed to it as a crucial test of the truth or falsity of the claims of the Maid.

Those who came first into the village were able to secure the most desirable positions about the open square or on the housetops, steps, and porticoes that overlooked it. Daring boys bestrode the branches of the trees that lined the road. The provost of Marville, swelling with dignity, rode up and down on a white palfrey housed with an azure cloth worked with three *fleurs-de-lis*. The stone steps of his house, which fronted on the square, were spread with an Indian carpet, and a group of honored guests were seated here,—the lords of Thichiemont and Villette, and some ladies and gentlemen of their company.

On the opposite side of the green, the house of Jean Gugnot made an even more imposing appearance. Every door and window was hung with banners, pennons, cloth-of-gold, and embroideries, bearing witness to the enviable distinction which had befallen it in being chosen for the dwelling-place of the Maid. The rich silversmith owed this honor to a former acquaintance with the Marshal de Retz, and an unscrupulous zeal in his service which counter-balanced the odium connected with his name as a money-lender and usurer.

His fellow-townsmen grumbled, and took unfriendly note of the lavish expenditures incurred on this occasion, remembering how his coffers had been filled. They counted the sheep, calves, and oxen that had

been slaughtered for the feast to which all comers were invited; the capons, herons, geese, and ducks, vats of butter and cheese, and casks of wine and mead, which promised to reimburse the victim of past extortion to the extent of his appetite if he were willing to lay aside the grudge of years and sit at Jean Gugnot's table.

"His house is chosen, no doubt, because it is large and commodious. He has, besides, a very pretty daughter," said Jean de Thoneletil, Lord of Villette, in reply to a severe remark from the provost's wife, who could not bear to look at the decorated façade of the house over the way.

"I have three daughters," she replied, straightening her portly form, and glancing into the background, where three heads of tightly plaited reddish hair, surmounted by tall white head-dresses, might be seen eagerly extended from the buttery windows.

"As if the pretty daughter were of the least concern in this case," said the beautiful young Lady de Villette with a frown. Her husband did not observe the remark; but Des Armoises, who was her neighbor, felt called upon to answer it.

"Beauty always makes itself felt," he said.

"In proof of which my husband has not taken his eyes from the charming young bourgeoisie of Metz, who came in your company," she answered discontentedly. "Tell me who she is."

“Eudeline de Novelonpont,” replied Robert. “Her brother is my friend, the tall man yonder.”

“Who stands like a hound straining at a leash,” said the lady. “His sister’s hand on his arm is all that keeps him from imitating the crowds who press to the edge of the pavement, thinking to see better if under the very hoofs of the horses. She is pretty, too, but not remarkably so. Her mouth is too wide, and her lips a trifle too full. But perhaps, my Lord of Thichiemont, your heart and eyes are engaged there.”

“No,” answered Robert. “Beauty delights my eyes wherever they meet it; but my heart is a dull, stony thing, that never beats the faster for the touch of a woman’s hand.”

“Delightful insensibility,” said she. “I wish Jean could imitate it. But it does not seem to me that you are of so calm a nature as you would have me believe. You have been this half hour as restless as a hawk, starting at every sound. Is it the Maid of Orleans to whom you have vowed your fancy?”

“Aspiration there would be as hopeless as longing for a star,” answered Robert evasively.

“Yes; I hear that Count Ulric of Würtemberg, who came on a mission to her, straightway forgot it, and declared himself her suitor; and that he follows her everywhere she goes, like a captive led in chains. But now, how cross you look! Neither

you nor Jean has given me a smile to-day. Unless I can make myself a round-faced bourgeoisie, with a velvet cap and silk-lined kirtle, or wear armor and ride astride like a man, I can please neither of you."

Robert was spared the necessity of a reply, for at this moment a distant shout caused every one to start into eager attention. The crowd pushed and elbowed for a better position, until the provost's guard, bearing down upon them, cleared the way in advance of a company of mounted soldiers, who clattered into the village. They were men long of limb and broad of chest, with fierce, scarred faces, and hands that could deal deadly blows with mace or battle-axe; a picked band of troopers led by a lieutenant of the Marshal de Retz. They bore his pennon and the red flag of France.

Behind them came a figure clad in shining armor, and riding a stately horse whose golden housings swept the ground. It was a woman; for her head was bare, and her soft chestnut hair brushed back from the face fell in ringlets upon the gleaming cuirass. A squire, who rode close behind, bore a white banner with golden fringe, upon whose surface was displayed the figure of God in glory and two saints each with a *fleur-de-lis*, and in golden letters the inscription, *Jhesu Maria*. At this sight, which was a resurrection from the past,

a mighty shout burst from the throng: "Noël, Noël! Long live Jeanne Darc!" The people, frantic with joy, flung their hats into the air. They gave thanks to God. They wept and prayed, and prostrated themselves that they might kiss the fringes of her saddle-cloth. Mothers crowded about her, holding young children in their arms to beseech her blessing for them; the sick and the infirm dragged themselves into the path that they might beg healing at her touch.

The soldiers, at the command of their leader, halted in a motionless column at the farther end of the square, while the bright vision, upon whom all eyes were fixed, rode slowly around the green, her progress everywhere impeded by the crowd, whose frantic demonstrations could not be restrained.

"She is coming," said Eudeline, trembling with excitement, as she clung to her brother's arm. "Soon she will be near enough to touch us if she should put forth her hand. Now you can assure yourself, brother, with your own eyes whether she is indeed Jeanne Darc."

Jean de Metz made no reply. His whole being was concentrated into the single faculty of sight. The scene was so like a vision from another world that he could not be sure that he were not in some strange state of trance. Surely his doubt had been the weak-

ness of a timorous spirit, unable to believe that which it most desired. Should he obey the impulse that urged him to shout "Noël" with the rest, and to prostrate himself at her feet?

Jeanne rode on until she came before the provost's house. Here her attention was attracted by the group in the doorway, made noticeable by the glowing colors of the Indian rug, the satin and velvet of the provost's wife, and the fur-trimmed, jewel-bespangled garments of the Lady of Villette and her sister.

The noble war-horse, descendant of a long line of thoroughbreds, picked his way through the crowd unguided by spur or rein; stopping with arched neck and pawing hoof, if the throng pressed too closely, and resuming his course with high-bred dignity when it opened before him.

For a few moments the Maid sat thus motionless regarding the provost's guests, unmindful of de Metz and his sister who stood below and close beside her among the crowd. Suddenly her glance brightened into recognition. A quick blush colored her cheek. She shook the reins; and her horse, obeying the motion, sprang forward regardless of obstacles.

"It is you, Des Armoises, who were honored by her smile," said Villette, leaning forward, and placing a heavy hand upon his friend's shoulder.

"I had the joy of sitting beside her at a banquet

which the captain of the city gave her in Metz," answered Robert. "It cannot be that she remembers me!"

"Oh, you are not one that is easily forgotten," said the Lady of Villette. "Your mirror, if you look into it, will tell you that."

"A barefaced compliment," said Villette. "Marie does not praise my face."

"It is too seldom turned towards me for that," retorted his wife.

Eudeline, watching her brother, saw his look change quickly.

"What is it, Jean?" she asked, conscious of a sudden pang, and wondering if his thought were hers.

"She is an impostor," he said. "It is all witchcraft and delusion. Let us go to church, Eudeline, and pray that God may restore our senses."

Des Armoises left his seat, and joined the brother and sister in response to a piteous look from Eudeline. Her eyes were made for soft appeals to the chivalry of man.

"She did not see you, Jean," said Robert. "I felt for your disappointment. What glory it would be to clasp her hand with the world looking on in envy. That will come later; at the banquet to-day, perhaps. I will see that you have a place at the provost's table."

Jean turned his head aside.

"It was a bitter disappointment," he said; "but not as you imagine. For a moment my heart gave a leap, and I cried, 'Thank God!' The next I humbly besought God's mercy upon us, for we all are ensnared in a trap of the evil one. This woman is an impostor."

Robert seized his friend by the arm. "Do not dare to speak that word aloud," he said. "Keep your insane suspicions to yourself. As well might that blind man yonder deny the sunshine, and declare that we who behold it are deceived. Much brooding over this matter has made you mad."

"I feared he would be ill," said Eudeline, "for the week he has been home with me in Metz he has hardly eaten or slept."

"My health is good, and my judgment sound," said De Metz. "I see only too clearly that this is a device of the Marshal de Retz, who has used the power of enchantment he has long been credited with possessing to make another woman take for us who have known her the form and features of Jeanne Darc."

Des Armoises regarded his friend with compassion.

"Surely you are beside yourself," he said; "but let us hasten, and we shall witness the meeting of the Maid and her brothers. That may well be the test of her truth."

As he spoke, he pushed his way across the green

to the open space before Jean Gugnot's door, where the leisurely progress of the Maid had brought her. At her approach, two young men, who had been waiting beneath the pavilion of cloth-of-gold in front of the house, advanced to meet her as she descended from her horse. Robert was near enough to observe the radiant delight that shone upon her face.

"Jean! Pierre!" she cried, embracing them with tears, while they kissed her in return with expressions of affection.

"Are you convinced, doubting Thomas?" asked Des Armoises, turning in triumph to his friend.

"They have conspired together in a dishonorable scheme to foist a pretender upon the world," said De Metz. "I can no longer endure to witness its success. I will return to my home, and take counsel what it is best to do."

"You will not stay to the banquet?"

"Food would choke me."

"And your sour looks would spoil the feast. Go, since you must; but leave your sister in charge of the Lady of Villette. I will answer that she shows her every attention."

"Eudeline will not stay without me," replied Novelonpont.

"It is a pity she should miss the banquet and the dance," said Robert.

"She is no happier than I," said Jean. "I notice that she can scarce keep back her tears."

"Some one may have wounded her thoughtlessly," said Robert with quick concern.

"She is, like me, amazed and confounded by the success of this imposture."

"Fie upon you, for an obstinate unbeliever!" cried Des Armoises. "No heretic was ever burnt for a more persistent delusion."

"It is you who are deluded," retorted De Metz. "The look of love the enchantress gave you has turned your head. It was that which opened my eyes; and at that moment I saw her as she is, — a lying impostor, decked out to ape the looks and manners of an angel of light."

"Heaven mend your wits!" exclaimed Robert. "It is useless to reason with you. A look of love do you say? Would it were possible!" And following his friend, he rejoined Eudeline, protesting against her early departure, and declaring that he had hoped to dance with her that night.

Eudeline hesitated how to answer, and looked regretfully towards her brother, who was making hurried preparations for the return.

"Do not listen to him," said Jean over his shoulder. "He speaks from the heart; but he can no more answer for his actions than the sailor who hears the

siren's song. If that bright-eyed witch should smile at him again he would leave all else and follow her."

"Once you are home, Eudeline, call the surgeon and see that he bleeds your brother, and gives him a soothing draught," whispered Robert. "He talks like one distraught."

Eudeline made no reply, and only gave a down-cast glance in answer to Des Armoises's farewells; when, having assisted her to mount behind her brother on the tall gray horse which was accustomed to the double burden, he kissed her slim fingers, waved a smiling farewell, and stood to watch them out of sight. The two dejected travellers, with their faces set towards Metz, went slowly towards the setting sun, which flung long shadows across the path, and sent a sheaf of arrow-like rays darting skyward from the bosom of a silver-lined cloud.

"It will be dark before we reach the city," said Eudeline.

"No matter. There is a moon, and the stars are bright. Do you sit at ease, sister?"

"Very comfortably," she answered with a sigh. "It is a tedious road."

"But when we are at home, you will be glad. It is pleasanter than a lodging among strangers."

"Yes," said Eudeline, wiping her eyes. "They

say the plates for the banquet were to be of solid gold."

"No better than pewter for taste," answered Jean.

"They were to have twenty horns to make music," she remarked.

"And all blowing in a different key, no doubt," he answered. "Seeing how freely the wine ran, I doubt if one of the servants or musicians has a steady head by night."

"If the Sire Des Armoises had danced with me, I should not have noticed the music," she said.

"It would have been precisely as I warned you," answered her brother. "Did he have eyes for you to-day when we watched the procession? You might have been in Metz for all thought he gave you then."

"He came directly I looked at him," said Eudeline with trembling lips.

"He is kind and friendly," said Jean; "but do not set your heart upon him, sister."

"How can you think of such a thing?" cried Eudeline with energy. "He is less than nothing to me."

"So much the better," rejoined her brother in a tone of relief. "Sit steady now, and we will gallop along this piece of level road. See, there is the tower of the cathedral, and the spire of St. Seglenne. It will not be long before we are at home."

Eudeline, looking back, saw the glare of the bonfires that illuminated the village, redly reflected on the cloud of fog which hung above the swamps of the valley. On the other side, the evening star throbbed in the golden west. Its radiance, too, was dim and wavering, veiled by tears.

CHAPTER IX.

BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE.



THE dance was ended, the crowds dispersed, and darkness and silence fell over Marville. The bonfires burned themselves out, and the stars sank in the eternal order of their progress one by one behind the hill. Slumber put its seal on many records of shame, and released the weary conscience from its Ixion's wheel. The oblivion which all welcome nightly, though holding it the menace of joy at the end of life's day, fell impartially upon the just and the unjust.

In the high window of the silversmith's guest-chamber a light was burning at midnight. The sentinel who kept watch in the square below felt its companionship, and turned his eyes towards it as often as he came within range of its feeble beam; the light suggesting waking human thought and neighborhood.

Four people sat together in the centre of this illumination, which was made by three tall candles in the sockets of a branching silver candlestick, placed on a

carved oaken table, near which chairs had been closely drawn. The room was full of ponderous furniture, and hung with faded arras which was black in the shadow and only showed here and there traces of color, and figures whose inventor's purpose must remain unguessed. The curtained bed was a vast cavern of shade, relieved only by the glimmer of the gilded fringe of the counterpane. High-backed settles with upright cushions of a forbidding hardness occupied either side of the fireplace. Heavy oak chairs were set squarely against the walls, as if it was never meant that they should be displaced. The only sign of disorder in the room consequent upon its occupancy was that upon one of the settles a trailing ermine-lined robe was carelessly flung, supplemented by a pair of shining red leather shoes with extremely long and pointed upward-curving toes. On the other side, a heap of armor lay upon the floor.

The four who sat about the table were absorbed in conversation of a sort that has a double meaning for the ear and the heart, the emotion behind it being of a kind not translatable in words. The only medium for the communication of the intensest feeling is the language of the infant or the brute; cries, gestures, and muscular contortions which the orderly conventionalities of life forbid. Pierre du Lis, with rage in his heart, hid a tiger's impulse beneath a cloak of gentlemanlike indifference.

Father Ambrose had long since learned to sink the man in the priest; and the gentle authority of his manner gave no hint of the lava flow of tumultuous feelings that surged beneath the surface. Jean du Lis showed a diplomatic reserve in the presence of forces suspectedly hostile to his own designs, and maintained an attitude of serene impartiality.

The pretender, unmasked before those who knew her, was neither abject nor defiant in her challenge to their judgment. She had thrown aside her outer robe; and the tight-fitting undergown of blue silk, wrought with golden *fleurs-de-lis*, defined her queenly figure, leaving neck and arms bare. A golden circlet rested on her floating chestnut locks, that curled at the ends in heavy ringlets upon her shoulders. Her feet were thrust into jewelled slippers. In this rich attire she had all the dignity of a sovereign awaiting unjust impeachment.

"Is that wrong which one does of necessity?" she asked, in answer to a sneering innuendo from Pierre.

"No," replied Ambrose in his soft measured utterance; "necessity is a power against which we struggle like a fly in a cobweb to our greater entanglement. What is man, the creature of a day, that he should make himself superior to nature of which he is a part? Free will is a dream of the schoolmen. Yet as Christians we strive for an unattainable perfection; and the

heart will never be free from the consciousness of guilt until freed from the burden of the flesh. All who have tried it know the salutary power of penance to refresh the spiritual part of man which languishes in its gross material prison. Why should you, Pierre, blame a fault which you have shared by raising no voice against it?"

The pretender started. "The marshal trusts you. You could not think of that," she said.

"No," answered Pierre; "not without giving you an alternative, and coming first of all to a deliberate understanding. Let us hear your story. Ambrose has told us all that happened before you left Nancy, and the marshal's letters which have been read to us describe the manner in which he perfected his scheme. It remains to be explained how the force of necessity was applied so as to leave you no choice of refusal; for in spite of what the holy Ambrose says, I feel myself a free man, and able to refuse or accept, compelled by no one."

"If you feared for your life?" she asked.

"I risk it daily," he replied.

"But as a soldier, in the heat of battle," she said. "That is not as if you were threatened with murder by a slow and torturing process, the fear of which turns your blood chill."

"Give me proof of this," said Jean; "and the marshal shall hang as a felon."

“There is no proof but my word,” she replied, “and that would not avail. The greatest men in the kingdom have sought in vain for judgment against him. He is a relative of the De Montforts, a terrible name. In his castles he is like a king commanding an army.”

“Tell us your story, sister,” urged Jean.

“I will begin, then, from the day I reached Suze,” she said. “I was to serve the lady, his wife; but I found her absent, and learned that she had gone to visit kinsfolk near Orleans with little prospect of return, as she had quarrelled with her husband. This gave me great uneasiness; but until the marshal should come I had no one to reproach for the deception, and no choice but to remain. By his orders I was treated with distinction, given a suite of apartments, allowed a couple of waiting-women, a man-servant to attend me when I rode out, and a minstrel to sing to me when I chose. It is to David, the minstrel, that I owe every cheerful hour in that miserable time. The women were surly and hostile; and the man-servant, a spy set to watch my motions, and return me safe to the castle after every excursion. David alone was my friend. The others called him a madman, and told me he had times of frenzy when he would declare that he was a great nobleman, who had been murdered and brought back from the dead; but this

I never believed, for well as I knew him he never showed any signs of a diseased mind, but was always the same cheerful companion, ready to amuse my dullness, and relieve my anxieties.

“He taught me many things besides his songs. He knew history and politics, and the manners of the world, and all that was going on outside the dull walls of Suze. I wondered how he learned it; for we saw nothing all day long from the windows but dreary stretches of level land fading into the sky at the horizon; and the only moving objects within view were the peasants who stalked over the marshy fields on long stilts that made them look in the distance like gigantic storks.

“When David was called away from Suze I was desolate indeed, and was made more so by the news of the marshal's expected return. I had learned to fear him and dread his coming, even though it should put an end to my tedious imprisonment. When he came, I was ashamed of my fears; for he treated me with distant politeness, promised that his wife would soon return, and gave me instead of David an Italian priest for instructor. He taught me in reading for an hour a day; set me the task of embroidering an altar-cloth, and for the rest, left me entirely alone. I was not even expected to attend the chapel service; though upon the marshal's return it was daily

celebrated in a splendid manner with candles and incense and the music of a choir of boys whom he brought with him.

“François, the priest, told me that these boys were the children of wealthy parents, who were glad to entrust them to the care and instruction of the Marshal de Retz, who was noted as the most devout and religious nobleman of his time. He was so fond of church music that he made it his business to encourage it, as he did all arts and learning, for he was as well-educated as he was religious. He had given money to found several convents; and he was at vast expense to secure the services of a teacher of music who had lately been in the employment of the Duke of Burgundy, and was now at Suze engaged in training the marshal’s choir of fifty boys.

“From my rooms in a wing of the castle I could see the windows of the chapel; and in the evening I loved to watch them when they were illuminated by the light within, and shone in beautiful many-colored patterns. Often I could hear the distant strains of the music; and it was so wondrously sweet that it never failed to bring tears to my eyes.

“One cloudy autumn evening, the chapel windows shone so enticingly through the mist, that they tempted me to break the monotony of a dull day by attending the service, as I had longed but never dared to do,

since François had sharply forbidden it. The inner door towards the main part of the castle was always kept locked as if to discourage my going beyond bounds in that direction; but on this day, as it chanced, the key was in the lock.

“The corridor beyond led between long suites of rooms, with many turnings and steps up and down; but the music guided me, and brought me at last to the foot of a carved stone staircase where a curtain hung in an arched doorway. I peeped between the folds of the curtain, and stopped, dazzled by the light of candles on an altar close before me. The vaulted roof of the chapel was over my head, for I was in a recess just behind the choir at the entrance used by the boys in the processionals. They stood near me in ranks like white-robed seraphs, singing as they must in paradise. François, the priest, presided at the altar, and acolytes swung censers; but the only worshipper was the Marshal de Retz, who knelt in front of the chancel.

“I was afraid to meet his look, and drew back behind the curtain; and then for the first time I noticed a little choir boy in his robes of satin and lace, crouching in a corner of the curtained alcove, and watching me with frightened eyes that showed traces of tears.

“‘What ails you?’ I asked. ‘Why are you not in your place?’

“‘I am so frightened,’ he answered.

“‘What do you fear, poor child?’ I asked.

“‘The marshal,’ he replied with a sob. ‘Every day one of those who sing here goes away. I fear it may be my turn.’

“‘Goes where?’ I asked.

“‘No one comes back to tell,’ he whispered. ‘The marshal murders them I know. Go away, if you can.’

“‘A terror seized me in spite of myself. ‘Come, let us go together,’ I said, holding out my hand.

“‘I dare not. I shall be missed,’ he answered. ‘I must go back and sing those devilish hymns.’

“‘What do you mean?’ I asked. ‘They are so sweet.’

“‘But listen,’ said the child. ‘They are singing the office for All Saints’ Day; but where we should say the holy names we are forced to use those of devils, — Barron, Orient, Belzebuth, Satan, and Belial. Listen, and you will hear them.’

“‘I had not noticed the words to which the sweet sounds were put; now I listened, and heard what I could not have believed possible, — an impious parody of the holy office. It seemed a sin to be there; and I turned and rushed from the place, not daring to look behind.

“‘At the top of the staircase, bewildered by fear, I took the wrong turning, and entered a part of the castle that was new to me. These were the rooms

in the donjon tower. They were all low and dark, with rough stone walls, and heavy groined ceilings. Candles burned here and there in iron sconces; and from the farthest room a bright light shone, illuminating the rest. Curiosity led me to this room, which was so singularly furnished that I felt a chill of fear. The walls were hung with crimson arras wrought with strange characters in black. A great table stood in the centre of the room, lighted by a red lamp that swung overhead. On this table were numerous sheets of manuscript, written in red ink. As I leaned above them to examine the curious lettering which was unlike any I had seen, my sleeve that rested on the table showed a red stain. A pool of the ink was on the black table-cover. I started, for it looked like blood. At the same time, I heard a noise in the room below so unearthly that I was forced against my will to steal down the short flight of stairs that led between to see what could be there.

"What I saw, brothers, I can never tell. The thought of it brings back too plainly that hideous moment. I turned and ran like a frightened deer; and, led by some providence, I reached my room, where I fell upon the floor in a swoon.¹

¹ The story of the infamous Gilles de Laval, robbed of its worst features, still terrifies the imagination of childhood in the guise of the nursery legend of Bluebeard.

“For weeks I lay in a fever, unconscious and delirious; and David, who watched beside me, feared that my reason would never return. It was his presence, and the sight of his kind face that restored me.

“The rest I can soon tell. My blood-stained sleeve betrayed to the marshal my knowledge of his crimes. He threw off his reserve, and told me plainly of his plans for me; promising me wealth, happiness, and distinction if I would agree to represent my sister to the world, and a fearful end if I refused. I had no choice but to obey.”

She sighed, and leaned back wearily in her chair, as if shrinking from the expression of the thoughts that were plainly to be read upon the faces of her listeners, — wrath and curiosity and horrified incredulity. Pierre began a series of eager questions, with all the manner of an inquisitor zealous for judgment. Jean drew his sword, and vowed by the cross upon it to bring the marshal to justice if the tale were true. Ambrose fell upon his knees, and prayed inaudibly, with a white, stricken face.

“I have told you all I shall ever reveal, Pierre,” said his sister; “urge me no further. But I can tell you of a happier time that followed when I left the Castle of Suze, each stone of which seemed cemented with blood, and went to live at a convent in Nantes. The abbess was a kinswoman of the Mar-

shal de Retz; and she would listen to no hint against him, holding his honor dear to her as part of the inheritance of the race from which she had sprung. Her own virtues were known throughout all Brittainy; and she was everywhere loved and venerated. She herself undertook the superintendence of my time in the convent, and gave me a share in her intimacy that fell to no one else; and soon her slightest wish became my law. I could have knelt and kissed the pavement where she walked, so great was my admiration for her; yet she dwelt removed in a cold serenity that never allowed a near approach or an expression of affection.

“The marshal had told her of his scheme; and she accepted it and glorified it by the loftiness of her mind, determining that the deception should serve a religious purpose, and in this way reconciling it to her conscience. She talked to me constantly concerning my mission, and gave me the highest motives for it; assuring me that the spirit of my sainted sister would inspire me to finish the work which she had left undone. When she found me loath to assume the name of another, judging it in spite of her arguments to be a lie, she contrived a solemn service of dedication that should reconcile my scruples, and at the same time prepare me for my work.

“It took place in the chapel at midnight, when she

and I were alone there together. I knelt at the chancel steps; and the abbess, laying her hands upon my head, made a prayer to St. Michael, St. Catherine, and St. Margaret to visit me and bless me. She sprinkled my forehead with holy water, and gave me the name of the Pucelle to be mine henceforth. In the convent I had been known as Claude.¹ She blessed me, and counselled me to go forth on my mission cheered by the presence of the saints and the favor of God.

“From that hour my conscience was at rest. When the marshal’s command sent me forth among strangers, in the escort of rude soldiers, I thought of Jeanne, prayed to the saints, and took courage. When I met you, my brothers, and you received me kindly, it seemed that my prayers were answered. It was fear of your denial that had made me tremble.”

“I would gladly leave you with your flattering hope,” said Pierre. “I pity you, Catherine, and no longer hate you, as I did an hour ago, for your sin against Jeanne. But a soldier’s religion admits of no such compromise with truth as your holy abbess found it easy to make. I have no mind to aid you further than to spare you open shame before the multitude to-day. You shall go quietly away before I declare the imposture to the world.”

¹ By this name the pretender may be known to the reader.

The pretender trembled, and speechless with anxiety, clasped her hands upon her heart.

Jean protested in her stead; and an angry argument took place between the brothers, during which Ambrose arose from his knees, and stole from the room.

"There is only one alternative," said Pierre at last. "I imperil my honor by admitting it; but the credit of our family, for which Jean pleads, may be served by it. So this I yield to you and to him. If you, Catherine, will marry the German count, who sues, they say, for your hand, and withdraw yourself at once to Würtemberg, obliterating as much as may be all traces of your past, and forever refusing public notice, I will make no open scandal; I will keep your secret. Forgive me, Jeanne, for this."

He hung his head, and stood with downcast eyes awaiting a reply.

"Agree, Catherine," whispered Jean. "I know Pierre when he sets his teeth thus, like a bulldog. Torture and flame would not move him. Promise all he asks. It is your only safety—the only escape of all of us from shame."

"Must I marry where I cannot love?" she asked with quivering lips.

"Fool!" cried Pierre, stamping his foot, with an oath. "Do you prate of love when hell's chasms

yawn before you? Have you neither eyes nor understanding? I came into this room ready to strangle you with my own hands. Decide at once. Time presses."

"She will agree," said Jean. "I answer for her."

"I must have her oath," said Pierre. "Swear to me, Catherine, that you will do this."

"I swear," she answered feebly, at the next moment bursting into tears.

"Come away, Pierre, you brute!" cried Jean. "She is worn to death with all this talk. To bed, sister, and sleep well. There are worse fates than to be a Rhenish countess, lady of a rich domain, and safe from the tyranny of the cursed marshal."

Claude ran to him, and clung about his neck.

"Love me, Petit-Jean," she said. "You are all I have to love."

He kissed her, and awkwardly disengaged himself.

"But stay a moment, Petit-Jean," she urged, when the door had closed on Pierre. "My heart is aching for news from home. Seat yourself; and let us talk awhile as brother and sister, long separated and reunited. Tell me of my mother."

"She is well," answered Jean; "and thinking you to be her daughter Jeanne, she sent you many messages and gifts."

"Have I no right to them?" asked his sister quickly. "Indeed, I know she would send me quite as many

in my own person; for I was always her favorite. And my mother would not count me an impostor; my second name was Jeanne, though no one called me by it. How is my father, and the rest, — aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews?"

"There have been no deaths since that of Jacques."

"Would to God I could see Domrémy!"

"Cologne is a finer place."

"I hate it!" she cried with energy. "And I hate the Rhenish count with his red hair and beard. He swallows his words, and says them all in his throat; and he follows me about with silly compliments, and frowns at every man that shows me civility. It angered him that Sire Nicolle Lowe should give me my beautiful war-horse, and Sire Aubert Boulay a helmet, and my Lord Groignat a sword. The young men who are noble in heart, as well as in name, welcome me in the spirit of brothers, and are eager to join my company, and fight for France in the wars. What will they think of me if I give up my plans, and break Jeanne's vow by becoming a wife?"

"You have given them no assurance as to the future."

"No, I am to await the marshal's orders. He bids me remain in Marville till John the Baptist's Day, when he will make his wishes known to me."

"It will further his wishes to have you become

Countess of Würtemberg," said Jean. "You could never endure the test of constant publicity. Who knows if Orleans would continue to be deceived, or that the king would not discover the imposture? The marshal must have this in mind when he chooses an obscure border village for your residence, instead of Orleans, Paris, or Loches."

"Must I give up my purpose of finishing Jeanne's work?" she asked.

"That is a fantastic notion of your lady abbess," he replied. "No one lives who could finish Jeanne's work. None but a fanatic would attempt it."

"Then I have no longer an excuse to give my conscience," she said dejectedly.

"A noble alliance will be your best justification," said Jean. "St. Catherine must have inspired our hard-headed brother with the thought."

"Could it not be another than Count Ulric?" she asked with a blush.

"Is there another?" queried Jean.

"If I must marry, there is one my heart would choose," she answered shyly. "Though whether he is of the same mind, I cannot say."

"Pierre will wait on no uncertainty," said Jean. "Suppose he had denounced you as an impostor, where would be your suitors now? Count Ulric himself would desert you."

"I had not thought of that," she said with a contracted brow.

"Nor do you realize that only the marshal's great power and wealth, and his influence with the king, aided by our co-operation, can save you from such exposure by any one of a hundred conceivable chances. We risk everything on an uncertainty."

"You torture me, brother."

"It is well that you should face the truth," he answered, with little sympathy in his tone.

"I had hoped you would be kinder, Petit-Jean," she said.

"I mean to be your friend and helper," he answered.

"But you do not love me as you used."

"Women count nothing of importance but kisses and compliments," he rejoined impatiently. "It is for your sake that I am willing to give up my honesty, and burden my conscience with a heavy sin. Does that count for nothing?"

Claude answered with a sigh; and when her brother was gone she leaned her arms upon the table, buried her face upon them, and found relief in tears from the torture of a wounded spirit, suffering the wreck of its dearest illusions.

CHAPTER X.

REBELLIOUS LOVE.



ECAY had levelled the ancient castle of Thichiemont; but a tower of later Gothic construction still remained, and being added to and repaired had served for some time as a hunting-lodge. Many stories were told of the scenes which had been enacted here during the life-time of the late Charles des Armoises, father to the present owner, and of a memorable season when the Duke of Burgundy was his guest; and to hunting and feasting had been added the gorgeous luxury in which he delighted, and the frivolous diversions borrowed in his honor from the French court, politics being ignored on this neutral soil.

The old steward, Nicole Pasquin, in moments of confidence, would relate to a crony installed on the opposite side of his hearth, the jests and scandals, wild deeds and bursts of riotous passions, that had set cheeks flushing and hearts throbbing that were now cold in the grave. He kept a stock of memories,

as he did of ancient armor and cast-off possessions, that might be rubbed up and furbished into acceptability; but it was his habit to impose upon the vulgar by a dignified silence which left his discretion unimpeached.

André Gosson, the farm overseer at Haraucourt, the modern estate which had long since withdrawn the preponderance of wealth and social activity from Thichiemont, was the one most often chosen as confidant by Nicole; for he it was who needed to be reminded of the superiority of the past over the present, a truth he was inclined in the face of all the facts to dispute.

The arrival of the new lord of Haraucourt was a subject of inexhaustible interest among his retainers, from the wealthiest of his tenants to the swineherd in the field. Nicole and André must needs attempt to fathom its significance by the aid of many a deep potation.

Nicole maintained that a noble lord who rode into Haraucourt unattended, and supped alone in his castle, must be suspected of a leaning towards the the church. None of the race of the Des Armoises, so far as memory reached, had taken religious vows, or distinguished themselves in any other profession than that of arms. It was on the contrary reported, under the rose, that Lord Charles had put the thumb-

screws on a wealthy abbot to persuade him to yield a share of the revenues of his property which Sire des Armoises claimed.

Nicole's theory was supported by much circumstantial evidence. The new lord could read and write; he never swore unless it were in Greek, in which heathenish language he had been heard to speak. He had even been known to recite Greek poetry, the chaplain at the castle vouching for the fact. He showed an indifference to the condition of his exchequer which encouraged all his agents in the falsification of their accounts.

Strangest of all, he made a speech from the church steps one Sunday, to a reluctant body of listeners whom the parish priest had succeeded in assembling by threat and exhortation, and solemn assurances of their lord's good-will. Lord Robert confided to his unsympathetic listeners that he had been deeply grieved to see that the news of his arrival had had the effect of a rumor of invasion by the *écorcheurs*.

Houses were vacated, ploughs were left standing in the furrow, household treasures were concealed or packed for transportation in a hurried flight. It was a wild *saute qui peut* to the shelter of swamp and forest, more to be trusted than the tender mercies of their liege.

He promised the peasants that he would in future

deserve their confidence if they would give it to him ; declared that he felt to them as a father ; and capped the climax of their amazement by offering to remit a year's rent from any one who had suffered unjust extortion in the past. Not a hind within the remotest quarter of the district but had his tale of woe ready by next day to pour into his ears.

He would sit like Charlemagne in the public square accessible to all, holding the scales of judgment impartially where he could ; but, yielding at last to the growing mass of evidence that his father had been a dastardly oppressor, he called a conclusion, remitted all rents for a year, and left Haraucourt for Thichiemont where he was now installed.

The consciousness of his presence in the lodge gave zest to Nicole's criticisms of his master. The old man's face bore a triangular scar as evidence of a blow received as a boy from the hilt of Lord William's sword. The occasion of offense had been the surly expression of countenance which he had worn when standing by, as witness to his father's flogging.

These were the good old days which Nicole regretted, scoffing at the effeminate notions which Lord Robert had brought from the East, and challenging his displeasure on the chance of a servant's tale-bearing.

The summer had invaded Thichiemont. A climbing vine flaunted its streamers from the topmost battlement to signalize its conquest, gained foot by foot, of the solid masonry. Birds had built on ledge and cornice, and upon the jutting gargoyles whose grossly cynical faces had jeered at the joyous abandonment of their twitterings and love-makings, renewed with each generation, as if no other had been or would be. The mother bird now taught her young to fly, and soon the nests would be empty.

The lagoons of the marshes lay beneath the sun, like burnished brazen mirrors set in a frame of reeds and rushes and brightly colored flowers. On every side stretched fields of waving grasses, golden yellow, russet and red; but the unwary traveller who ventured to cross their level expanse might sink in boggy pools or treacherous slime. The Lord of Thichiemont occupied his leisure hours in considering what might be required of wealth and mechanical skill to drain these sloughs, and convert them into fertile fields inhabited by a happy and industrious population.

Thichiemont, in its past and present, was a challenge to his conscience; a wilderness purposely kept waste, that game might multiply to afford its owners the pleasure man takes—more brutal in this than the brutes—in maiming and killing; leagues of forest

untouched by the axe; stretches of fertile ground unbroken by the plough; the peasants reduced to live by poaching and thieving, or to work as beasts of burden.

"Two years' rents from Haraucourt should work the beginning of a change in Thichiemont," he mused, finding satisfaction in the thought.

The heat of midsummer drove old Nicole from his seat by the fire, to a bench under a plane-tree which fronted the road over the drawbridge, and gave a wide view to the west. Here he sat daily, directing the work of kitchen, barn, and granary, as their various attendants passed within his notice.

"Here comes Master home from Marville," said Louis, the stable-boy, dropping the bag of hay which he carried to run and hold the stirrup, the vision of a silver-piece lending wings to his zeal.

"Ho, Nicole," called the Lord of Thichiemont, the ring of a youthful excitement in his tone, "prepare the best in your stores for supper today. I am to entertain the Maid of Orleans."

Nicole rose hastily, urged to an unaccustomed agitation.

"Run, Michael, run like mad," he said to the greasy scullion loitering in the doorway, "and tell André Gosson to come hither. You will find him at the mill, if he be not through with his business

and gone home. Tell him to bring me all the produce he has collected for Haraucourt. We have guests coming. He shall be well paid."

Then the old steward made the tour of kitchen and pantries; visited the cellarage, and tapped a cask of ancient wine, religiously preserved in memory of Lord William, in whose time the vintage was made; ordered slaughter in pen and poultry-yard; had dingy stores of plate set out and polished, worm-eaten trestles mended, that they might stand firm enough to support the boards of the table, lengthened to the extent a banquet should require; and when all was going forward as he planned, he welcomed André to a seat upon his bench and a share in his satisfaction.

"Well done, Gosson," he said, scrutinizing the loaded sledge that stood before the door, drawn by two panting peasants who wore over the neck and about the chest a wooden frame like a yoke to which stout ropes were fastened. "This will serve, I think. I know not how many are to be in the company; but if half of those we saw at Marville should come, we have not spits enough to roast for them, or trenchers enough to serve from. No matter. I have sent an order to Isaac the Jew at Marville for all we shall require. I have not a crown to pay him; but he may get it from my lord, as he would not from his father."

The Lord of Thichiemont chanced to pass at this moment, and noticing the group, drew near with anger in his eyes.

"How is this?" he cried, frowning at his ancient servitor. "I have not before seen men harnessed like beasts in my service. Let it not be seen again, here or at Haraucourt."

Gosson shared the lightning of his glance.

"It is the easiest way for them," he stammered; "far easier than to bear it on their shoulders."

"Are there no horses or mules to be had for hire?" asked Des Armoises.

"There is no money in this house to pay for them," growled Nicole.

Robert flung him his purse. "That need be no excuse," he said. "Pay the men each a crown, and let them go."

The steward obeyed, fingering the gold as if it burned his fingers.

"How many shall we count upon for the banquet, my Lord?" he asked, willing to ignore the unpleasant incident.

"You may lay a service for three," replied Des Armoises, turning upon his heel to hasten across the drawbridge, unconscious of the consternation which he left behind him. The sound of horses' hoofs had reached his ears, and soon the riders became visible,

a woman in a crimson riding-gown, and her companion, a gray-robed priest.

"Is that the Maid of Orleans?" cried André staring. "She looks like any lady of quality with the plume in her hat, and the fur trimmings on her petticoat. I thought she went in armor with her squire and page."

"She will give up fighting the English now, I suppose," said Nicole, hoarse with the effort to conceal his deep vexation by a tone of indifference. "She is to wed a Rhenish count. I made sure he would be with her, and a train of knights and ladies in their company, some from Metz, and some from Luxembourg. Times have changed. Never was I bidden to serve for three in the hall at Thichiemont."

He retreated within doors, unwilling to witness the arrival which had so overturned his expectations.

Gosson waited until his master had entered the lodge with his guests, then he recalled his peasants who dared enter no protest against an authority known of old and not to be undermined on the instant, and accompanying his sledge-load of provisions, he took his reluctant way to Haraucourt, grumbling that Nicole's folly had added a league to the distance.

The master of Thichiemont sat at table while a tall clock fastened to the outer wall showed by its single hand the hour of four. Nicole had been

punctual to the supper hour, which in the old days had been advanced or retarded according to the fortunes of the hunt, sometimes extending to an all-night revel.

Des Armoises was undecided whether to be vexed or amused by the peculiarities which he noticed in the service of the meal, and which he credited to Nicole's long retirement, not in the least recognizing the intended sarcasm.

The table, covered with dilapidated damask, stretched the full length of the great hall, furnished on one side with settles which would have accommodated a hundred guests, and on the other with dressers heaped with plate for the convenience of the servants who handed the dishes in their order, presided over by Nicole. One end of the board was occupied by a roasted boar, and the other by an enormous pasty, containing two goslings, three capons, six chickens, and a dozen pigeons, boiled with savory herbs. Nicole had given hours to the construction of this masterpiece, and had found relief for his wounded feelings in every extra span which he added to its height and breadth.

For the rest, a few nuts, some native fruits, and the superlative old wine, furnished forth the feast, supplemented as it was by the steward's frequent apologies. Lack of time and helpers skilled in the work, he made

bold to declare, alone had prevented his serving such a distinguished company as he had often done the Duke of Burgundy and other dignitaries, with the best efforts of the most accomplished cooks; roasts gilded and covered with sugar-plums and pomegranate seeds; fish cooked in parsley and rolled in powdered ginger; jellies of red and white formed to represent the crests of every nobleman present; plums stewed in rose-water, and pies covered with gold-leaf.

Claude laughed in girlish enjoyment of the ludicrous situation: her host's serious face; the old major-domo's rusty garments, wild hair, and neglected beard contrasting oddly with the exaggerated dignity of his deportment; the dilapidated grandeur of the service of plate and linen; and the ineffectual efforts of the three convives against the gigantic pasty, which remained like an impregnable fortress showing the scars of an ineffectual attack.

At the conclusion of the meal, Des Armoises took his guests to walk about the courtyard and terraces, whence Father Ambrose shortly afterwards withdrew himself in order to examine the ruins of the chapel which had been built in Oriental style by Lord Raoul Des Armoises, the Crusader, whose bones reposed in a demolished crypt beneath. Robert willingly left these reminiscences of the past to the solitary contemplation of the priest, and returned with a sigh of relief to

Claude's side, where she stood watching the level flight of a heron that wheeled above the trees. The warm wind brought the balsamic scent of the forest upon it, and the transparent air quivered with the flight of dancing gnats like golden motes in the sunbeams.

"This is a perfect day," said Robert; "one perfect day of life; but, alas, how soon to be ended."

"It is always so," said Claude; "a happy time flies fast, and sad hours drag."

"All time is happy for you," he answered.

She sighed, and strayed onwards, plucking idly at the bushes that thrust vagrant branches across the path, as if forbidding progress along its unfrequented way. The stoutest of these *Des Armoises* held aside for her to pass, while he submitted to the blow of the recoil as if indifferent to the smart, or welcoming it as an offset to the pain in his heart. The sun was fast slipping down the western slope, while the synchronous lengthening of the shadows of tower and tree gave the measure of its decline.

The narrow, overgrown pathway led to an open rectangular plot of level greensward, set about with ancient trees, and furnished at one end with a marble bench which invited to repose, since it became evident that the limit of progress in this direction had been reached. This clearing marked the site of a former tennis-court, long abandoned and forgotten.

“I have never chanced upon this spot before,” said Des Armoises, looking curiously about him. “It is like a bit of Arcady.”

“It is as peaceful as Paradise,” responded Claude. “I wish I might be forever in such a place.”

Des Armoises checked the reply that rose impulsively to his lips; and bending a troubled gaze upon his companion, he said, “I have a confession to make, Jeanne. Grant me pardon if it offends.”

She seated herself upon the marble bench, removed her hat, and allowed the sunbeams, as they filtered through the oak-leaves, to fall in a golden shower upon her hair. She inclined her head with a wan smile as she replied, “I have no fear of your offending by any thing you can say.”

“I am predestined to do so,” he answered; “for whether you are to marry the Count of Würtemberg from choice or, as I have guessed, from motives of policy forced upon you by others, my love for you, to be guiltless of offense, should be unconfessed. I must dare your displeasure, and take advantage of this precious moment, which I know too well can never return, to tell you that you are the one peerless woman in this world for me, whom to love hopelessly is a happier destiny than to win another. I ask for nothing; I will not woo even a look of kindness, for I am no Tristan treacherously seeking that which I can not openly claim.”

He paused, meeting Claude's uplifted, smiling eyes.

"Do not speak, Jeanne," he added hurriedly. "Do not tell me that you forgive me, for I feel my resolution melting like the wings of Icarus in the sunshine. If you should be too pitiful, I should forget your name, your past, all that I most admire in you, and degrade my adoration for you into a selfish human passion that will have all and give all, defying God and destiny. I have known the madness of such a love, and have felt its thorns, and tasted the dust and ashes of repentance. I must not now relinquish my highest ideal, and yield again to Circe's enchantment."

Claude's look changed quickly as if the shadow of a passing cloud had fallen upon her face; and she rose, saying with a mocking inflection, "If I am not to answer, messire, I must not listen; nor did I come to Thichiemont for this."

"You remind me that I abuse your acceptance of my hospitality," said Robert. "The despair I have suffered since I heard of your approaching marriage must be my excuse. I have fought as if with fiends in this dreary solitude, which you have now consecrated for me by your presence. But I am a man again. Let us forget what I have spoken."

There were unshed tears in Claude's eyes; but Robert observed only the enigmatical smile with which she regarded him, as she said, "Most willingly; and in re-

turn I will confide to you that my marriage is, as you imagine, a necessity forced upon me. I have never been free to follow the dictates of my own heart; but in this I am happy, since I please my brothers, and take the course that duty has marked for me."

Des Armoises sighed as he replied, "You will leave France, and you will forget France; Jeanne the Pucelle will be only a name, as if she had indeed died at Rouen."

"Yes," said Claude; "a breath of wind to stir men's lips, and be forgotten. Another confidence I will give you. Father Ambrose has promised me that, if at the last my courage fails me, he will contrive that I shall escape to the shelter of a convent. In any case, this is our last farewell, messire. We shall not meet again."

"God bless you," said Robert, bending above her hand, and kissing it fervently. "I will come here and think of you and of this moment, which with all its torment is happier than any that can follow."

A gray robe was visible through the trees; and Father Ambrose came into sight, walking rapidly with a preoccupied expression, which changed into a furtive smile as Des Armoises advanced to meet him.


"The day wanes," said the priest; "and the horses are being made ready for the return."

Claude stooped for a moment above the marble bench to reassume her hat which lay there; while at the same

time she detached a silver medal from a tiny chain which she wore about her neck, and placed it carefully upon the seat which she quitted. It was a small silver shield, bearing on one side the arms of the family of Du Lis, and on the other the words *Te Amo*.

CHAPTER XI.

A MESSAGE.

AUCOULEURS became a Mecca of pilgrimage when it was learned that Jeanne's brothers had returned, bearing letters and messages from the Maid, to Orleans, to the king, and to the people of her native place; and that the messengers were lodged on their way to Loches at the expense of the governor of the town. It was rumored that Jean du Lis had been promised the appointment of Provost of Vaucouleurs; but the intelligence which swallowed up all else in amazement was that of the approaching marriage of the Maid.

Domrémy stood aghast at the news. Isabel at first vigorously denied it, and then immediately fell to weeping to think that she had not been bidden to the wedding. Father Fulbert, to whose dull ears the information was imparted by a zealous neophyte from the convent, astonished the pious youth by staring a moment indignantly in his face, and then administering

a resounding blow which sent him staggering against the wall. "Lies and villainy!" cried the old priest. "The world is full of slanders against the chosen of the Lord." Then he fell into a violent fit of weeping, which was the cause, it was commonly thought, of the stroke of apoplexy of which he died the following week.

Isabel rode on a pillion behind Durand Laxart as far as Petit-Bury, where Pierre's wife had been confined in his absence at the house of her uncle, and where the whole family assembled on the occasion of the christening, which had been fixed for the day succeeding the father's arrival.

The event which called them together was almost forgotten in the excitement of greeting, comment, and question which filled the house with a hubbub as of swarming bees. Pierre's wife, Jeanne of Prouville, who sat propped up in state in the great bed of the guest-chamber, noticed with indignation that the congratulations which should fall to her share were given to Isabel, and that Jeanne, and not the latest addition to the family of Du Lis, was the object of all thoughts.

When the priest in the midst of the ceremony demanded the name of the child, an unexpected discussion occurred.

"As to that, there is only one name possible," cried Isabel. "She must be named Jeanne in honor of my famous child."

"I have no objection," replied the young mother, "for it is the name I had meant to give her, being my own. You may call Jeanne Dare her godmother, if you choose."

"No," said Pierre. "I forbid it. She shall be called Catherine."

"You cannot be serious, Pierre," exclaimed his wife; "we have one Catherine and two Jeans. Why repeat another name in the family?"

"Call the child Claude," said Jean, regarding his brother with significant displeasure. "Our sister Jeanne took that name in the convent, and loves still to be called by it. It is one that is new in our family, a pretty name, and suitable as well for a man as a woman. It commemorates our sister's reappearance better than any other title we could give a god-child of hers."

"No; that, I think, the name of Catherine does," answered Pierre doggedly; "and that is the babe's name or none."

With this, the service proceeded to a close, Pierre's strange mood still clouding his wife's serenity.

"That was a kind thought of yours, my son!" exclaimed Isabel. "You have a fond and faithful heart. No one else to-day has remembered your sister Catherine."

"Ask my brother Jean if she has not been often

in his thoughts," rejoined Pierre, regarding Jean as he spoke with a sinister smile.

Isabel could not long allow her attention to wander from the subject uppermost in her mind. "To think that Jeanne is to wed a count," she said. "I must go to the wedding if I have to crawl on hands and knees. How far is it to Arlon, Durand?"

"It is twice as far as Metz," he answered.

"You could never make the journey," interposed Jean quickly. "The roads are not safe. No one knows where the *écorcheurs* may next descend with ravage and pillage. Wait till I come back with my answer from the king. I will try then to arrange a meeting."

Isabel wiped her eyes. "I have waited till I can wait no longer," she said. "Unless I see her, I cannot yet realize that Jeanne is alive, and that you have talked with her face to face. How did she look? Was she pale? Had she fallen away in flesh? Was she happy or sad?"

"As happy as a lark," answered Jean; "and looks much the same as formerly. A trifle stouter and more ruddy, perhaps."

"A little taller, too, I think," said Pierre gravely; "and her hair a shade lighter."

Jean frowned fiercely at his brother, and, drawing him aside, engaged him in earnest conversation, the

result of which was declared in Pierre's relinquishing the mission to Loches to his brother, while agreeing to share its expenses.

The family gathering dispersed with expressions of mutual good-will, heightened by the consciousness that each was a sharer in a distinction contingent upon his relationship to the famous Maid of France.

Isabel rode homeward deep in a project which she did not dare to confide to her companions, but to whose execution she addressed herself with the shrewd pertinacity of a daughter of Lorraine. Meeting Robin of Greux in front of her house, she found means to speak to him unnoticed.

"You are the man I had in mind," she said, "to help me in a difficult undertaking, that will require courage and discretion, and the ownership of two stout horses. If you will meet me at nightfall in the hillside pasture yonder, I will tell you my meaning with more particularity. Meantime, keep it secret from every living soul."

Flattered by the confidence, Robin swore by the holy rood to observe the utmost discretion and punctuality; and, relying on this promise, Isabel stole out-of-doors in the fragrant dusk of the late summer night, walked through the long, rustling grass of the churchyard, and up a winding path to a sloping meadow set about with a fringe of thicket. Three

sheep huddled in a corner of the fence-rail were the sole occupants of this inclosure, to which in the daytime a milch cow had entrance; for the flocks of the family of Dare had dwindled with the increase of more permanent possessions, and since Isabel dwelt alone with her husband in the homestead, a neighbor's child was hired for a few deniers to drive the sheep back and forth between brook and pasture, — a neglectful attendance, which set old Jacques lamenting the closely calculated industry of former days.

The animals, not knowing Isabel as their owner, fled at her approach; and she sank upon the grass in the cover of the thicket and waited, listening to their restless movements, to the crackling of a dry twig here and there, the shrill voices of frogs in the valley, and the hoot of an owl in the forest on the hill. Although she strained her ears, she could distinguish no other sound. Robin had failed her. This she realized with a sense of bitter disappointment; and rising stiff and weary from her cramped position upon the dewy grass, she took her way across the open square of starlit meadow. At the same time a figure rose to meet her from the opposite shade.

“Why have you delayed?” asked Robin, stretching his arms with a yawn. “I have been waiting here for an hour under the hedge-row.”

"I could not come before," said Isabel, not admitting the futility of her wasted moments of strained expectancy. "You have been fast asleep here upon the grass."

"I may have had a wink or two, since I am seldom out of bed at this hour," he answered; "but I slept with one eye open, expecting you every moment. What do you want with me?"

"I want you to take me to Arlon," she said. "I shall die if I may not see my daughter Jeanne. My sons will not listen to my going; and Durand believes that I should wait until she sends for me. But go I must, and at once."

"I am the man to serve you," cried Robin with alacrity, slapping his thigh to give emphasis to his words. "Ever since I heard she was to be a countess, I have been cudgelling my brains to contrive how I might gain the notice of Jeanne Darc. Nothing could serve my purpose better than to go in your company; for when she gives you the seat of honor at the wedding feast, a place may be found for me above the salt; and when she takes you to Cologne to live in her castle, I may get the place of seneschal or chamberlain. When shall we start?"

"At once," replied Isabel. "I have left word with Aveline to visit my house early in the morning. When she finds me gone she will stay and care for Jacques."

I have a purse of money in my belt which I have hoarded piece by piece to pay for masses to be said for my children who are gone ; but Jacques and Catherine will not grudge it to me if I use it now to see my Jeanne, for the prayers we said for her when we believed her dead may surely be placed to the credit of the two who need them."

"It would take a wiser head than mine to settle the debit and credit in such a case," answered Robin doubtfully. "I cannot tell what a churchman's answer might be; but as a man of the world I commend your decision, for money is the first requisite for our journey. I will saddle Grizzle, and catch Dapple who is in the field, and meet you in the lane by the mill-pond before the Wagoner is an hour lower."

This promise of dispatch was the sweetest satisfaction to Isabel's impatience; but for all her eager haste, she lingered a moment in the churchyard to bend above the slab which bore the name of Jacques Darc.

A tear fell upon the stone. "Alas," she sighed, "a mother's heart is torn by wounds as many in number as the children she has borne; but the living must be put before the dead."

Two moving figures might have been seen at midnight, if any had been abroad to observe them, climbing the dusty white highway till it met the horizon, where for a moment their outlines were darkly defined

against the broad luminosity of starlit sky, and then lost from view in the shadows of the verdant valley.

The master of Haraucourt was weary of country solitudes where ungrateful peasants thwarted his efforts at reforming the condition of their lives by a stolid indifference to his plans and an invincible distrust of his purposes; where his agents returned his confidence by systematically defrauding him; and where Nature herself had become unfriendly to his disenchanted spirit. When the hay was harvested, Des Armoises turned his back on Haraucourt, meaning to ride to
* Metz by way of Villette, where he had a pressing invitation to visit his friend Jean de Thoneletil and his fair wife. He set forth on a day in early August when the air was full of a languorous warmth which drew forth spicy odors from thicket and forest, and set the bees buzzing, embarrassed by the choice of sweets, among a wilderness of flowers. The landscape in the maturity of summer loveliness shone in the mellow light as if seen through a golden veil. Robert felt his heart expand, in spite of himself, with the joy of mere existence. He thought of the seductive blue eyes of the Lady of Villette, and in contrast to them recalled the tender reserve of Eudeline's glance; and half unconsciously he hummed the refrain of a popular pastoral which ran: —

“ Si tu peux avoir ta bergère
Oserai-tu demander mieux ? ”

“ We ask too much of life,” he said to himself, “ Frois-sart’s shepherdess teaches the true philosophy: —

“ Et la bergerette
Disait en sa chansonette
Si je veuil estre ta miette
Oserai-tu demander mieux ? ”

These words he sang so gayly that the woodland alleys re-echoed with the sound; and a traveller, lost in their mazes, blessed his good fortune, and spurred his weary horse to come up with the singer, meeting him at the crossing of the roads where four corners marked the points of compass.

“ Praise God and St. Rémi,” said the newcomer. “ I have found you, Sire Des Armoises, when I hardly hoped to live to reach your castle. My horse is on his last legs; my stomach is as empty as a bagpipe; and I tremble so with weakness that I can hardly sit upright in the saddle.”

This address came from the lips of Robin of Greux, whose pinched and pallid features and weather-stained apparel, as well as the jaded appearance of his horse, bore witness to the truth of his words. Des Armoises looked with surprise at the unwelcome apparition, and cast his glance along the highroad as if meditating escape; but Robin, divining his purpose,

pressed near him, and laid his hand upon the pommel of his saddle, while he said, "I have a message to you from the Maid of Orleans."

A quick flush rose to Des Armoises's cheek, and a sudden light to his eyes, as he cried, "Out with it, man! Tell it in as few words as possible. I know you of old, and have no mind to be deluged with a flood of empty verbiage, out of which I must sift a few grains of sense. Quick, deliver your message."

Robin folded his hands upon his stomach with a grimace. "I cannot talk fasting," he said. "If you will take me home with you and feed me, I will tell you all you want to know."

"I am travelling to Villette," said Des Armoises; "but yonder lies the way to my hunting-lodge in the forest. My steward will furnish you with meat and drink, since I will give you an order upon him. Meantime, here is a purse which is yours when you shall have discharged your commission."

"Keep your money for the present," said Robin. "My story includes the adventures of six long and tedious weeks, and the wisest man in the world could not tell it in ten words. If you have no time to wait for it, let it go. The message was of no great importance."

"Of that you are not fitted to judge," replied Robert in vexation. "But since you value nothing

so much as liberty to prate uninterrupted, I will humor you so far as to turn out of my way and spend one night at Thichiemont."

"Ha!" cried Robin, "that is one of the words of my message. Jeanne made me repeat it a dozen times for fear I might forget."

"For God's sake tell me the rest," urged Des Armoises impetuously. "You shall have a gold crown for each word."

Robin's small eyes shone covetously, but he shook his head with obstinate decision. "When you hear all, you will give me that and more," he said. "The cathedral of Toul was not built in a day; haste makes waste; and he who goes too fast falls over the stile. There is a time to talk and a time to keep silent; and hunger is a foe to wit."

"Follow at your leisure, then," said Des Armoises. "It is a straight road, and you cannot miss it. I will precede you to urge Nicole to instant attention to your needs."

"You cannot do better, messire," responded Robin with dignity; "and I beg you will see that Grizzle has an extra measure of oats, for the poor beast is as nearly starved as his master."

An hour later Robin sat at table in a small arched chamber of Thichiemont tower, an empty trencher before him, and a full mug of wine at his side,

while his face bore a look of beatific contentment, expressed also in the mellifluous flow of his sentences. Des Armoises paced the floor, his head bent and his hands clasped behind him, listening, with an effort at patient attention, to the leisurely progress of the narrative.

“When Isabel Romée had come to this decision, nothing remained but to put it into execution,” said Robin bombastically. “And though I knew that the road from Metz to Arlon was beset with dangers, and liable at any moment to the attack of *écorcheurs* and *retondeurs*, I did not hesitate a moment to promise her the protection of my company.”

“Where did you gain your information?” inquired Robert. “Of late we of Lorraine have been spared the visits of these robbers.”

“Wait till you hear my story,” said Robin. “I have a piece of paper here that will cause you to open your eyes. Isabel was so mad with impatience to see her daughter Jeanne that fear of the devil could not restrain her. It began pouring rain by noontime, and as dusk came on we lost the way, as I did again to-day, and we floundered through bog and mire, forded brooks, and climbed slippery hills, till I thought we both would die of weariness; when at last a light shone out of the forest, and we made our way towards it, thinking it to be a house. Well, messire, in a

moment it was as if we had entered hell, and all its fiends were let loose about us. They rose up from behind bushes and rocks, armed with arquebuses and arbalets; and one tall fellow gave me a blow which sent me sprawling on the ground, while another pulled Isabel from her horse, stole her belt of money, and was carrying her off in spite of her screams, when with great presence of mind I called out, though flat on my back in the mud with an arquebus close to my mouth, 'Hold your hands, villains! This woman is mother to the Maid of Orleans, and I, a friend whom she intends to honor with a high office under the Count of Würtemberg.' This timely speech wrought a change in our affairs. The bandits considered that we might be worthy of ransom; and they sent to ask the orders of their chiefs, who were feasting together in a house at no great distance, whose master they had taken for ransom, and whose stores they had broken into and distributed among their men. The name of Jeanne Darc acted like a charm; and we were immediately treated by the chiefs' orders with the greatest consideration. Isabel's money was restored; for my damaged coat I was given a new one; and we were bidden to attend the chieftains at supper. This honor I would willingly have dispensed with, for I never cared to be of the company of rogues and villains, and Isabel was well nigh fainting for fear;

but even the devil is not as black as he is painted, and these two gentlemen, it proved, were very distinguished soldiers, being no others, indeed, than the famous Étienne de Vignolles and Pothon de Saint-railles, who were no common bandits, as they assured us, but were officers of the king's justice, as bailiffs of Vermandois and Bourges. They had met on the borders of Luxembourg, meaning to join themselves to the command of the Maid of Orleans; but, learning of her intended marriage, they did not continue their journey, La Hire declaring himself deeply disappointed at the failure of their plans. They had meant to win credit by undertaking the siege of Rouen, or some other great enterprise under the leadership of the Pucelle. Meantime, they lived off of the country, which they considered was no more than their just reward for the services they had done it; but no good Frenchman, I was told, had ever suffered at their hands. For the mother of the Maid of Orleans, their respect was so unbounded, that they offered us an escort of soldiers for the rest of our journey; and to make our return secure, they gave me this slip of paper marked with their names as passport. No one, they said, would dare to oppose its authority. It has carried me safely through the country as they promised me; but it has neither clad my back nor filled my stomach. No one has taken me

for an *écorcheur*, though I had these two names to show to my credit."

With this, Robin produced a crumpled piece of parchment inscribed with the autographs:

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. On the left is the signature 'Poton', which is written in a stylized, somewhat blocky cursive. In the center is the word 'AND' in a simple, all-caps serif font. On the right is the signature 'Isabel', which is more fluid and elegant, with a large, sweeping initial 'I'.

Des Armoises looked at these signatures with interest. "You had a fortunate escape," he said; "but tell me how you met the Maid."

"It was a game of hide-and-seek," answered Robin. "Isabel fell sick from the drenching and the fright she had had, and I left her in a peasant's house on the road to Arlon, promising to return with her daughter, or to bring a litter to carry her the rest of the way; but my horse was lame, and I was forced to travel slowly, and when I reached the duchess's castle I found that Jeanne had left it for Cologne, and that my acquaintance with her secured me neither money nor credit. So back I posted to take counsel with Isabel; and found her so ill with a

rheumatic fever that she could not move in the bed. 'The devil has bound me hand and foot,' she said, weeping. 'You must go without me to Cologne;' and she gave me all the money she had left, trusting that when Jeanne knew of her state she would send her a purse full.

"As I was not sure that Isabel would live to recover from so violent an illness, I found means to send word of her state by a passing company of muleteers to her friends in Toul, and from thence to Vaucouleurs; and I set out again alone with the courage of a knight-errant, and with constant ill-luck; for I met with many delays and mishaps, which I will not now take time to relate."

"Thank Heaven for that," interposed Robert.

"And if it had not been for a merciful providence I should never have reached Cologne alive. I fell in, however, with a party of merchants who were travelling that way, and they made me welcome to their company, and were useful to me in interpreting the strange jargon of the people, and making me acquainted with their ways. When I reached Cologne, I found that Jeanne was off again to the summer residence of the Counts of Würtemberg, at a distance from the city; but as she was expected to return, I determined to wait for her, and took lodgings with a worthy apothecary, whose son was a cripple

and spent his time in carving wooden images of St. Ursula, which he sold to pilgrims. I bought one of them, and kept it always by me; and to it I ascribe my cure from a singular ailment which baffled the skill of the apothecary, and did not yield to any one of a dozen drugs which he tried on me in succession."

"You chatter as if possessed by the spirits of St. Ursula and her eleven thousand virgins," exclaimed Des Armoises. "Be good enough to confine yourself to the main points of your story. When did you meet Jeanne?"

"I am coming to that," replied Robin. "Luckily for me, the apothecary's wife was a Frenchwoman, and one who missed no news of the day. It was through her that I learned of the miracle that Jeanne was to do."

"A miracle!" exclaimed Des Armoises.

"Yes. It was promised when Jeanne came to Cologne that she would cure the sister of the count of a mortal illness, and secure to him the succession to a disputed inheritance; and it was this which Count Ulric had ridden to Lorraine to beg her to do, not knowing he would fall in love and ask her to wife. Well, it seems she had no sooner gone to Würtemberg than the count's sister died, and the emperor adjudged the case of the succession against the count. This made no difference in Count Ulric's love for her,

and the wedding-day was set; but a rumor was started by the enemies of France that Jeanne was an impostor, and every one began to clamor for a miracle to prove her claims.

“For a time this went unheeded; but at last it was determined that she should show her power by working a marvel that would set all doubts at rest. The place chosen was a public square in the city, where a platform was built covered with cloth-of-gold, on which Jeanne was to stand in the presence of all the dignitaries of Cologne and its district. The guards of the Count of Würtemberg escorted her with great honor as she rode in armor with a squire and a priest by her side. When I saw her and her companions, my heart gave a leap, for I knew her at once, and my old friend, Pierre of Toul, who was promoted to be her confessor; and I made sure she would know me as well when she had the opportunity. Ambrose made a Latin prayer when she had come upon the platform; and then before the eyes of thousands, Jeanne did a marvel that I would never have credited if told me by another. First she broke a crystal vase, and laid the fragments upon a table; then she took a silken napkin, and tore it in two. After that, she raised her eyes to heaven, made some motion with her hands, and Presto! there were the vase and napkin whole as at first.

“The people shouted with delight, and she went back in triumph to the castle, where there was a banquet and a dance in her honor; and Count Ulric danced with her a dozen times it was said. But he who is high must look for a fall. The very next day the Inquisition brought against her the charge of heresy and witchcraft, which they said she had escaped at Rouen by the power of the devil; and it would have gone hard with her if she had fallen into their clutches; but, as it was, the count had warning in time, and sent Jeanne off by night under a strong guard to Arlon, while Count Ulric was shut up against his will in the castle, where it took three men to hold him and to keep him from doing himself an injury, so great was his despair at parting with his love. The old count, too, loved Jeanne well, and loaded her with gifts; but he had no mind to have a daughter-in-law who might be cited at any time before the Holy Office. I followed back again to Arlon; and there, after all this weary time, at last I met with Jeanne. She was seated at table with the duchess, when I managed to escape the notice of the guards and enter the dining-hall; where I fell on my knees before her. As ill-luck would have it, I chanced to overturn a trestle that held the boards of the table, and spilled half a dozen soups into the lap of the duchess, for which the duke

would have clapped me into prison; but Jeanne entreated my pardon, saying that I was a friend of hers; and afterwards she walked with me in the garden as gracious as you please, and listened to my story, and inquired for her mother, and sent her some money, and gave me a gold chain, and made me promise to go home by way of Thichiemont and ask the Sire Des Armoises if he had found the token which she had left for him upon the marble bench at Thichiemont. 'He will pay you a hundred-fold for this message,' she said."

"This is an amazing story!" exclaimed Des Armoises. "I do not know how much of it I dare venture to credit. Your last sentence, I doubt not, is apocryphal; and as for the rest, I cannot judge where truth ends and falsehood begins."

"I swear by all the saints that every word is gospel truth," said Robin. "How could I serve myself by telling you a lie? Remember that you promised me a crown for each word of the message, which you should increase tenfold, considering that I have risked my life to deliver it."

"You shall have all you ask, if you have told the truth," replied Robert. "Wait for me here until I return."

He hastened from the room, and ran rather than walked to the marble bench under the trees of the

tennis-court, where upon the seat there still lay the discolored silver medal which Jeanne had placed there. Des Armoises took it in his hand, and scrutinized its design and inscription with eyes upon which a new light dawned.

On the morning of the next day, at earliest dawn, Robin, with a heavy wallet and a light heart, resumed his road; and Des Armoises, turning his back on Thichiemont, made his way towards Arlon at the full speed of his fleet Arabian, that had never known his master make so severe a test of his strength and courage since he had carried aid to the forlorn-hope on the occasion of an ambushed attack by the Turks, when many a brave knight bit the dust.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ARCHIVES OF ORLEANS.



FLEUR-DE-LIS, the herald of Orleans, entered Arlon on a mission to the Maid on the same day that Des Armoises rode into the city; and the young man following in the throng that surrounded the famous messenger looked with interest at his splendid attire, at the tabard of crimson silk worked in gold with the arms of the city, and the porcupine, the device of the house of Orleans, embroidered on his shoulders.

Orleans was a name to stir the heart; and Robert felt with a pang of apprehension, that Jeanne's past, rendered vivid by this embodiment of its inspiring memories, might prove at this juncture his most formidable rival. He watched the gorgeous embassy enter the castle, preceded by a flourish of trumpets that set the echoes ringing; and feeling that his errand was hopelessly retarded by the herald's presence, he whiled away a tedious day at an inn, and towards evening set out on foot for the castle, where he learned that a

grand festival was in progress. This was made evident by the fireworks that, as soon as night came on, flew sputtering above the tree-tops to the delight of the crowd assembled to view them.

Mingling with the multitude, Des Armoises entered the castle gardens, which, thus illuminated, appeared as a labyrinth of winding paths bordered by tall box hedges, and interspersed with fish-ponds, arbors, pedestalled statues, and bosky clumps of wildwood, the whole arrangement bearing a designed resemblance to the pleasure grounds of an Italian villa.

The people of the town were admitted to the terraces whence the fireworks might be viewed, but guards wearing the badge of the house of Luxembourg were placed at intervals to repel their intrusion upon the walks immediately about the castle. These were occupied by a throng of masquers, fantastically arrayed as goddesses, troubadours, shepherdesses, and Saracens, whose gay voices mingled with the sound of hautboys and clarionets concealed among the trees.

Des Armoises strolled unchallenged among the revellers, avoiding the more frequented alleys, until he came to an inviting seat beneath an arbor, where he placed himself to watch the corruscating shapes of fire that blazed for a moment in the summer sky, like devastating comets, and faded leaving no trace behind; until the end of the display was reached in a sheaf of

arrows which darted to the zenith from the centre of a crown, beneath which appeared in blazing letters, the name *Jeanne*. This masterpiece of pyrotechnic art was greeted by universal applause.

"How do you enjoy our illumination, messire?" asked a voice in his ear; and turning hastily, Des Armoises observed that the other end of his bench was occupied by a shepherdess, whose crook bore a bunch of roses tied with a knot of ribbons which fluttered also at her shoulders and elbows, and were used to loop the floating draperies of her dress. "And why are you alone here in the shadow, when every other knight is performing his devoirs as an escort of ladies?" she added. "Is it that you are ill or in love?"

"The latter rather than the former," responded Des Armoises.

"I had guessed it," she replied. "Love is of itself a sort of malady, from which many recover, and none, as far as I know, die. Has your lady proved false or cruel, that you are left to mope alone?"

"You will understand my condition when I tell you that her name is that which lately shone across the heavens like Constantine's cross, a miracle of light," he answered.

"*Jeanne du Lis!*" exclaimed the lady. "Who are you, bold knight?"

"I do not go like yourself, incognito," he replied.

"All may know me as the Sire Robert Des Armoises."

The lady removed her mask, revealing clear blue eyes, and a broad, thoughtful forehead, from which her golden hair was tightly drawn back, and formed into plaited loops behind the ears; a severe style, then much in vogue, and trying to a face not in the first bloom of youth; but in this case it served to emphasize the delicate regularity of her features.

"I am Elizabeth de Goerlitz," she said.

"Duchess of Luxembourg," said Robert, making a deep reverence.

"The same," she answered, smiling. "You are thrice welcome to Arlon, Sire Des Armoises, and you are come at this time by the happiest chance; for no more than an hour ago I would have given my pearl necklace to have had speech with you."

"Is it possible?" he cried in surprise.

"I will explain my meaning," she continued. "An informal council was held this evening by Jeanne's friends most devoted to her service, her brother, her confessor, and myself, to advise with her as to the answer she should give to the petition brought by Cœur-de-lis that she should immediately return to Orleans. Since the untoward events of her stay in Cologne, of which you have doubtless heard, she has lost her buoyant spirits, and is oppressed with the

fear of disaster. Nothing seems to offer her such peace and security as the seclusion of a convent; and in spite of all advice she has determined to enter the religious life."

Robert exclaimed in dismay.

"When first she was in Arlon, she told me," continued the duchess, "that her marriage with Count Ulric was to be one of policy and convenience, dictated by the urgent insistence of her brothers. She owned that her heart was otherwise engaged, and in answer to my inquiries she revealed your name."

Des Armoises caught the hand of the duchess and pressed it to his lips. "You give me new life," he cried.

"You will now comprehend why I wished for your presence to aid me in persuading Jeanne that France and the world cannot consent to surrender their claim upon her."

"She will listen to me," he cried eagerly; "only contrive that I may have ten words alone with Jeanne, and I will owe you a lifelong gratitude."

The duchess rose with a smile as she drew a golden bracelet from her arm and flung it upon the seat she had quitted.

"I have dropped my bracelet," she said; "and Jeanne, knowing that I value it as the gift of the duke, will come here at my request to find it."

Des Armoises left alone in the odorous darkness of the garden which most of the masquers had quitted for the dancing-hall, listened with strained ears to each passing footstep, to the plashing of the fountain which fell from a Nereid's shell into a marble basin at the end of the box alley, and to the far-away sound of the music borne in dying chords upon the breeze. Each moment brought an alternating hope and fear. It was past belief that fortune and chance should so conspire to bless him; yet the thought of disappointment now was not to be endured.

At last the footfall for which he waited fell upon his ear, a light hurrying tread, which brought the wearer of a white robe into view among the trees, and led her in some trepidation to the spot where he was seated.

"Pardon me," she murmured; "the duchess has lost a bracelet which she thinks you may have noticed if she dropped it here."

"Yes; here it is, to be had at your own price," he answered; and breaking into a joyous laugh, he caught her hand, and drew her to his side. "Jeanne, you are mine," he said. "Nevermore shall you escape me."

At the sound of his voice she gave a stifled scream, attempting to repulse his encircling arm, though

conscious that resistance was in vain, since her heart, beating with tumultuous delight, cried out for surrender.

"How could the duchess so forget her friendship for me as to delude me so unkindly?" she exclaimed; and the darkness hid the smile that was at variance with the words. "What right have I given you, messire, to address me thus?"

"You are my future wife," said Des Armoises, "and you are the mistress of my soul. Do not deny the love you once confessed, or struggle against the fate that has made you mine."

She resisted still, making a last stand for conscience against passion. "I am unworthy of you," she faltered.

"You unworthy, Jeanne!" he cried.

"You do not know all," she said drearily. "You never can know all; but I must make such confession as I may before I give you my promise. After that, it may be you will cast me off."

"Is there anything you could do that I would not forgive?" he asked.

"Perhaps you have heard the story of that dreadful time in Cologne," she said hurriedly, "when the clamor of the people for a miracle suggested to the marshal that they should be contented by the appearance of one — a juggling trick that François had

taught me. He calls himself a wizard, but he is only a clever juggler made bold by lack of conscience. After that day at Thichiemont, I had determined that nothing should make me false to you. Come what might, I should never marry another." Robert kissed the hand he held. "But when I found that I must pose before the world as one inspired by a heavenly power, when conscious of such bitter degradation, I knew I could not look you in the eyes; I could not do you such a wrong"—here her voice faltered and she burst into tears.

"Jeanne, Jeanne," cried Robert in distress, "I do not understand. There is more than you have told me. How comes it that you could not defy the marshal, and refuse to do his bidding? Was not your love for me stronger than your fear of him?"

"Alas! I am caught in a net that fate has woven about me," she said. "I cannot explain my fear of the marshal. What he bids me, I must do. I have no power to resist."

Robert by an effort repressed his anxiety. "All that will be changed when you are my wife," he said cheerfully. "My heart will shield you; my sword will defend you. You will forget the trials which have weakened your courage. But Orleans shall have no claim upon you. You are henceforth to bless my home, and inspire my life. Is not that a mission

worthy of you, Jeanne? and will you not be content in it?"

"Do not call me Jeanne," she said, trembling and distressed. "If I refuse the entreaties of Orleans, I do not deserve to bear that name. Call me Claude. It suits me best."

"Jeanne is the name of my love," said Robert. "But your hands are cold and trembling. Are you not happy, sweet?"

• "No; for I still recall that moment when I stood upon a platform before the eyes of all Cologne, and the people applauded the marvel that I worked, and Count Ulric almost knelt in reverence; and the next day I had to flee to escape arrest by the Inquisition. Can you love an impostor, Robert?"

She asked the question with an intensity of emphasis that gave a strange shrillness to her voice, and she hung upon the answer as if it was to seal her fate.

Des Armoises felt a sudden pang; but the sound of his name pronounced for the first time by her lips stirred his heart with tenderness.

"Some day we will determine, as a question of casuistry, how far you deserve the condemnation of your conscience," he said. "This hour holds for us too rare a joy. We are ungrateful if we trouble its perfection."

Claude sighed, and remained silent with her hand

in his; and as he talked with soothing words of cheer and endearment, a load slipped from her heart.

"He loves me in spite of everything," she thought. "He would love me as well if he knew the worst; for he would know that necessity has made me what I am;" and her heart swelled with love and gratitude.

A distant blast of trumpets announced the conclusion of the dance. "Let us go in," she said. "The moon is down. It is late."

They rose; and Claude, turning towards her lover, flung her arms with an impetuous movement about his neck, while their lips met for the first time in a kiss.

"I love you, and I will be true to you," she said. "I give you this kiss as a seal of faith."

In the archives of Orleans the following disbursements are recorded:—

"On the 9th day of August, 1436; Letters carried from Jeanne la Pucelle." (A payment made to the messenger.)

"To Jean du Lis, brother of Jeanne la Pucelle, Tuesday, August 21st, 1436, 12 livres tournois; because he came to the Chamber and asked the procureurs to give him money to return to his sister. The king had ordered a hundred francs to be given to him; they only gave him twenty; he had spent twelve and had only eight left, which was little to return with, seeing that he was his fifth (day) on horseback."

Later on, the following record may be seen :—

“ To Cœur-de-lis the 28th October, 1436, for a journey that he made for the city of Orleans to the Maid who was at Arlon in the Duchy of Luxembourg, and to carry a letter which he brought from Jehanne la Pucelle to the King at Loches, in which journey he took 41 days, that is to say 34 days in journey for the Pucelle, and 7 days to go to the king. (He set out to go to the Maid Tuesday last day of July, and he returned the 2nd day of September following.)”

On the next page we read :—

“ To Jaquet Leprestre, the 2nd day of Sept. for bread, wine, pears and nuts dispensed in the Chamber of the said city on the coming of the said Cœur-de-lis who brought the said letters from Jehanne la Pucelle, and for giving drink to the said Cœur-de-lis who declared he was very thirsty, for this 2 s. 4 d. p.”

The historic thirst of the messenger, and the festivities with which his return was welcomed, are thus recorded; but the clerk of the exchequer could not incorporate in his account-books the amazing intelligence which the letters contained, the news of the approaching marriage of Jeanne la Pucelle with the Sire Des Armoises, an event which would render it impossible for her to accept the renewed invitations of her good friends of Orleans, whose welfare was ever near her heart, and whose faces she would hope to see when Providence should permit. The letter

to the king was of similar purport; and both were signed with the well-known autograph which had been the mark of the Maid:—

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jeanne". The letter "J" is large and stylized, with a long vertical stroke extending downwards. The rest of the name "eanne" is written in a fluid, connected cursive.

A stupefaction fell upon the spirits of the people when they learned these tidings; an incredulous dismay such as they had felt on hearing of the disaster at Compiègne. Some denied it, and blamed the Burgundians for starting a lying rumor to the discredit of the heroine of Orleans. It could not be that Jeanne was free to choose; it must be by the influence of the enemies of France that she was led to desert its cause and renounce her mission. There were murmurs of treachery and betrayal; and it was noted that to some of those high in the king's favor the event brought neither surprise nor dissatisfaction. Charles himself appeared well content that she to whom he owed his kingdom should win no more battles for his cause. He returned no answer to the letters sent from Arlon, though he received Jean du Lis with a vaguely gracious smile, and ordered that he should receive a hundred francs from the royal

purse, a gift five times better in the promise than the performance.

The dean of St. Thibaud, to whom we owe the Chronicle of Metz, thus concludes the account of the reappearance of Jeanne the Pucelle, "who called herself Claude: " —

"And then she came to Arelon, and there was made the marriage of messire Robert des Hermoises, knight, and the said Jehanne the Pucelle; and then afterwards came the said Siour des Hermoises with his wife the Pucelle to live in Metz, in the house of the said Sire Robert which was before Sainte Segoleine, and there they stayed whilst it pleased them."

CHAPTER XIII.

LAMIA.



E METZ had become more than ever the victim of a fixed idea which haunted him waking or sleeping, casting a shadow upon his life, and tinging all his thoughts with bitterness. One autumn evening he entered the room where his sister sat singing at her needlework, and flinging a book upon the table he drew the candles near and invited her inspection of it. It was a beautifully illuminated folio containing the story of Menippus Lycius of Corinth, who had been ensnared by the love of a Lamia, a serpent sorceress, and who died of despair when Apollonius the philosopher effected his disenchantment.

Eudeline had been carefully educated; and it was not difficult for her to read the French text, and thereby very readily to understand the Latin context which filled each alternate page. She was interested in the story, which was new to her, and delighted with the illumination, which was in the style of the

masters of the art; and she was prepared to thank her brother heartily for the gift, when he disconcerted her expectations by remarking, "I intend this book as a warning to my unfortunate friend, Robert Des Armoises, who still lives blinded by the fascinations of the Lamia who has seduced him. It may serve to open his eyes."

Eudeline blushed, and hesitated for a reply; for though her fancy was free from its early prepossession, she feared her brother's probable misinterpretation of the friendly interest she still took in all that concerned Des Armoises. To conform with the usual practice of romancers, Eudeline should be credited with an undying devotion to her earliest affection; since it is an established theory that the true woman can love but once; that loving once she must love ever with an irrational and spaniel-like fidelity. The patient Griseldas of life support this theory; but the maiden's heart bestows its homage obeying a law as instinctive as that which draws the flower to the sunshine and the bee to the flower. Nature too often is party to a conspiracy whereby this impulse tends to results which may be more fitly compared to the encounter of the fly with the cobweb, or the dancing gnat with the sundew's trap.

Eudeline had escaped heart-whole; but she felt an active good-will for Des Armoises which urged her

to interpose herself between him and her brother's threat.

"What good can you do by opening his eyes, brother, if thereby you end all his joy?" she asked.

Jean gave his sister a look which deprecated the weakness that could plead for the joy of a delusion in a world of stern realities; and he began to wrap the slim leather-covered volume in tissue paper, tying it carefully with a ribbon, as he said, "I mean this as a present to the bride. Des Armoises entertains his friends to-night as Lycius did those of Corinth; and I perhaps can play the part of Apollonius, and expose the impostor in the midst of her success."

"I can scarce believe her to be an impostor," answered Eudeline, "she has so fair a face; and as for sorcery, I saw her in the church, where she dipped her fingers in holy water and made the sign of the cross."

"She appeared to you to do so," replied De Metz; "she casts a glamour on the senses. With Des Armoises it is as if a circle were traced about his path, and within it all appears by the light of enchantment, and he can see nothing as it is, and judge nothing reasonably; but he sees and reasons as she wills who has seduced him."

"It is a strange thing if that be true," said Eudeline; "I wish you would not meddle with it, brother."

"I must do my duty," answered Jean with the exultant tone of a self-devoted martyr to a cause worthy of the last sacrifice.

Eudeline when left alone resumed her needlework, but not her song. With laborious care she drew the crimson silk back and forth to outline a gaping wound in the side of the hero of Roncesvalles, but it was not the thought of Roland's fate that clouded her brow.

With the closing in of the autumn night a heavy fog had settled over the city, obliterating the distance, and distorting the outlines of familiar shapes. An occasional lantern, hung beside a doorway, served to light a limited space, beyond which the darkness was deeper in contrast. Few passengers were abroad; and De Metz, as he hurried on his way, noticed in spite of his abstraction the forms and faces of two men, whom he overtook and passed in the lighted space before the porch of Sainte Seglenne. They followed him across the narrow street, and before the porter could answer his summons for admittance at the opposite house, they were close behind him; and the light of a blazing torch of pitch and resin, which was set in a stone receptacle behind the grilled door of the small inner courtyard, fell full upon their faces, revealing François, the priest, and David, the minstrel, whose visit to Domrémy, De Metz dis-

tinctly remembered. The minstrel, as usual, advertised his calling by the guitar which he wore slung over his shoulder; but the singular priest, defying custom and precedent, had discarded his gown and cowl for the rich garments and plumed hat of a man of fashion. De Metz had first seen him in the costume of a halberdier; but the strongly marked features, swarthy skin, and glittering, deep-set eyes, had impressed themselves upon his memory; and the foreign accent with which he spoke helped to complete the identification.

"Well met, gentlemen," said De Metz, obeying a sudden impulse of curiosity; "how fares your master, the noble Marshal de Retz, since last we met in Domrémy?"

"What impertinent chatterer have we here who claims acquaintance on the chance of year-long remembrance?" exclaimed François with a scrutinizing glance.

"I am Jean de Novelonpont," was the reply. "The marshal knows me well."

"Then I will bear him your greetings," responded François flippantly. "He will be glad to hear of your estate. As for himself, he is well and prosperous. The king has lately made him a count."

"Are you not also called Jean de Metz?" inquired David.

“Ah, by that title I remember you,” said François. “You are an early friend of the Pucelle. Let us not detain you. No doubt the banquet waits for your tardy arrival.”

“I am no friend of Jeanne Des Armoises,” answered De Metz; then fearing that he had betrayed too much, he entered at the porter’s invitation, and ascended the stairs in advance of his companions, who lingered on the threshold.

“I will accept your advice, David,” said François, in a low voice. “You can best do our errand alone; since Jeanne counts you a friend, while she hates me as she hates the devil. Contrive to give her the letter at once, assure her of its pressing importance, and bring me her answer at the earliest possible moment. I will wait for you in the church yonder. My devotions are long in arrears.”

Des Armoises and his bride sat side by side at the head of the table, which was filled with a merry company of guests assembled to do them honor. Claude’s face was glorified by the light of an inward joy, and Des Armoises wore the beatific expression of the happy bridegroom, for whom the universe exists only as affording place and occasion for the perfections of his beloved.

The entrance of the two late comers occasioned a stir among the guests. De Metz was greeted by

those who knew him; and Robert, with pleased confusion, welcomed his friend, and presented him to his wife, who had only a wandering attention to bestow upon him, since the minstrel engrossed her eyes and thoughts. "David, dear David!" she cried, rising to give him both her hands, while a burst of applause from the ladies greeted the sight of his be-ribboned guitar.

"Now we shall have some *chançons* and *rondels*," said the Lady of Villette. "There is nothing I love so well. The horns that have blown so sweetly in the farther room while we have been eating and drinking, have made us feast like princes; but nothing so carries *mé* to the seventh heaven of delight, as a love-song sung to a guitar in my ear."

"No one can sing so well as David," said Claude, smiling at the minstrel, who, after kissing her hands respectfully, had taken his place on a cushion at her side.

"It is a friendly thing in you to come unasked, De Metz," said Des Armoises in a low voice. "Only my doubt of your willingness to accept left you unbidden."

"I have brought my present to the bride," answered De Metz, laying the volume open upon the table as he spoke. "This book contains the story of the Lamia, the serpent sorceress, who seduced young Lycius of Corinth to his ruin."

Des Armoises regarded the speaker keenly as he replied; "For all that is friendly in your intention, I thank you. Take a seat here, and do us the honor to eat and drink with us."

The book at which Claude had hardly cast a glance was being handed about among the guests, who expressed their admiration of the valuable gift, unconscious that it hid a sinister intention. The Lady Des Armoises was absorbed in a murmured conversation with the minstrel, to whom she inclined her lovely head in the effort to catch his whispered sentences, rendered inaudible to any other by the fragments of brilliant melodies which his fingers drew forth in quick succession from his instrument. De Metz was not disconcerted by the bride's averted attention, or her husband's alert resentment. "It would add to your enjoyment if this pretty story could be read aloud," he said, looking about him. "It is a tale of enchantment which is as true as history itself."

"Oh, let us hear it!" cried the Lady of Villette. "There is something charming in the recital of marrow-chilling wonders. But who can read it? There is not a priest or a clerk among us. We are all worldly and ignorant folk, who think we do well to sign our names."

"You forget that our host is as learned as a

priest," said Villette. "He will read it to us, no doubt."

Des Armoises, being appealed to by his guests, found it impossible to refuse the request, though he was uneasily distrustful of De Metz's intention, and unwilling to lend himself to a scheme of his devising. Knowing his friend's persistent delusion, he guessed the significance which he meant should attach to the story; but Robert reflected that to resent so monstrous an insinuation was to give it greater credit than it deserved; and since he alone could suspect it, no harm could be done by ignoring it. With affected unconcern, therefore, he took up the manuscript, and read the story from beginning to end; during which, De Metz, in imitation of the Pythagorean philosopher, kept his unfriendly gaze upon the face of the bride, smiling to note that she was listening with an alarmed attention, and that she paled and trembled beneath his look. The minstrel's low music accompanied the reading, while, unobserved himself, he regarded De Metz with the alertness of a panther that crouches for a spring. Amid the murmur of applause that followed the conclusion of the story, De Metz arose with an air of prophetic denunciation, while he raised a warning hand; but before the words that trembled on his lips had time to form themselves in sound, a clanging chord sounded in his ear.

“Listen now to the interpretation of the history which you have heard,” cried David, springing to his feet, and challenging the attention of the company, while he won their good-will by a merry smile. “The truth of it is that of each man’s experience. Time is the disenchanting sage before whose gaze beauty fades and love grows cold. He steals the roses from the lips and cheeks, and plants there the ashen hues of age. He dims the eyes, furrows the brow, and robs joy of its illusions one by one. What can be done to resist this fell destroyer? Defy his power; enjoy your youth while you may; quaff the cup of delight to the dregs; drink, sing, and make merry, while the eyes of love are upon you; to which nothing is so potent an aid as the power of melody, no one so much your friend as the minstrel who helps you to forget the morrow. Listen to my song.”

In a mellow voice he began a light Provençal ditty in praise of ladies’ smiles. In the midst of the laughter and merriment which sounded as an echo to the music, De Metz remained in disconcerted silence, conscious that he had lost the fitting opportunity without which his purpose would fail of success. At this moment the band of musicians placed in an adjoining room began to play one of the mad Lorraine waltzes, and the ladies rising from the table entered upon the dance with the abandon of peasants who

trace the whirling mazes on their village green. Des Armoises, taking De Metz by the arm, drew him to a distance, while he said in low, emphatic tones, —

“For your unfriendly meaning in your gift and presence here, I shall, when occasion offers, demand satisfaction. I have borne much from you for the sake of our former friendship; but remember that he who attacks the credit of my wife by so much as a thought, if I have knowledge of it, must answer to me sword to sword for his base presumption.”

“As you please,” said De Metz composedly. “My quarrel is not with you, but with that false Lamia who has ensnared you.”

Des Armoises pointed imperiously to the door. “Go, before I forget my duty as a host,” he said. “If I did not pity you as a madman, I should be less charitable to your insolent ravings.”

David and Claude meantime were continuing the subject of their whispered conversation, as they stood in a curtained alcove, screened from the observation of the merry dancers.

“If I do not take François your promise to pay the money this letter demands, he threatens to betray your secret; that is true,” said David. “But consider that in this he means to work upon your fears. Suppose you should defy him, tear up the letter, and flatly refuse him, what would be the result? To fulfil his

threat would mean above all else ruin to the marshal, to whose service he is devoted body and soul. I hold it for certain, therefore, that if you resist, he will be powerless. Moreover, by an appeal to the marshal you will discover that he has no knowledge of this letter written in his name; and his vengeance will fall upon François for presuming to interfere with his plans, which include no condition so absolute as that of maintaining your credit. The advantage of the position is with you. Courage and resolution are all you need to make yourself secure of it."

"I thank you for your goodness, David, from the heart," said Claude. "But, alas, I have no courage to resist. François is in league with the devil. He will find means to fulfil his threat without endangering the marshal. Trust him for that. Oh, David, he will destroy me! Save me from him. You are my only hope."

The minstrel stood in deep reflection. "There is only one way," he murmured, looking up with shining eyes.

"Are you not inclined to be jealous of that gray-haired troubadour, Sire Des Armoises?" the Lady of Villette asked her host. "Since his coming, your wife has had thoughts for no one else. These musicians are wolves in sheep's clothing; they can steal a woman's heart with a song; and he has eyes that would en-

danger the discretion of Minerva, if he were as young as they speak him."

Des Armoises had tolerance for the folly of woman's chatter; but the thought of De Metz's active malevolence clouded his spirits, and made it difficult for him to appear at ease. With the departure of the minstrel, Claude's gayety had given place to a reserved preoccupation, which insensibly communicated its influence to the mood of the assembly. It was in vain that the horns brayed with shrill persistence: the dancers soon grew weary; and at an early hour the guests dispersed, guided by servants with lanterns and torches through the dark and tortuous streets. Des Armoises stood to light the last departure over the worn stone steps, which the feet of his ancestors had marked with the comings and goings of a hundred years, when a rising noise of voices and footsteps attracted his attention to a crowd which had suddenly gathered under the outer walls of Sainte Seglenne, where a narrow alley formed a deep channel of shade between the eastern side of the church and the projecting irregular fronts of the opposite houses.

"A murder has been done in the street," said a passer-by; and at the same moment Robert felt his wife's hand upon his arm. "A murder, good God!" she exclaimed; "and is the murderer known?"

Receiving no reply, she drew her mantle over her

head, and hastened across the street amid the crowd that had quickly gathered, urged by that impelling desire for sensation which is like the scent of the quarry to the pack in chase. Robert, as in duty bound, followed close at her side, his strong arm and broad shoulders aiding her to reach the foremost rank of spectators, who stood about a torch-lit space where the injured man was stretched unconscious upon the ground. A surgeon who knelt beside him with his fingers at the wrist had just opened his lips to pronounce authoritative sentence. "He lives. I can feel the pulse," he said. "With care, there is one chance in a hundred that he may recover."

"In which case," said a magistrate, who had been summoned by news of the crime from a snug seat in a neighboring wine-shop, "there is a chance that the truth of the matter may be discovered, as it cannot be by the testimony of one witness who may be interested to conceal rather than to reveal it."

His pompous utterance was cut short by a shriek of dismay. The Lady Des Armoises had flung herself upon her knees beside the prostrate figure. "David, David," she cried, to ears that were deaf to her voice.

"It is, indeed, the minstrel who but lately left my house," exclaimed Des Armoises. "How did it chance? Who was his assailant?"

“This fellow here tells a strange story, to conceal, perhaps, his own share in the matter,” answered the justice, frowning with judicial severity upon a man who stood in the background, in the close neighborhood of an armed soldier, who seemed to regard him more as a prisoner than as a witness. “He acknowledges that he was also in your house, which he left in advance of the minstrel, and that he stood in the church porch until the latter appeared, for no reason that he can give.”

“Jean de Novelonpont,” cried Robert, in surprised recognition.

“It happened as I have told you,” said De Metz hurriedly. “I met the two men in the street, and recognized them as servants of the Marshal de Retz. One entered the house, and the other waited without; and having some curiosity as to their errand, I stood to watch their meeting. The minstrel came singing from the doorway; and they moved across the street, and passed me in amicable conversation, though they spoke too softly to be overheard. When they entered upon this alley the minstrel fell back a step or two, as if to adjust the ribbon of his guitar, which he removed from about his throat. The next instant he sprang forward and stabbed the Italian in the back with as neat a stroke as ever I saw delivered, and with power enough in the blow to have

sent any man that was mortal into eternity; but, by some strange chance, the Italian escaped unhurt, and turned with a cry of rage upon the minstrel, who lost his footing, and fell with the other's hands upon his throat, choking the life out. His grip was like that of a vise, and did not relax when I was close upon him, and dragging him by the shoulder, as one might try to pull a deerhound from his prey. It was only when life seemed extinct in his victim that he rose and closed upon me, with such sudden fury of attack that I lost ground, gave way, and suffered him to escape before the coming of the guard whom my cries had summoned."

"You may believe this story," said the Lady Des Armoises, lifting a stricken face, while with a caressing touch she chafed the limp hand she held; "this François is a fiend of malice, and has sold himself to the devil, through whose power, no doubt, he escaped unhurt. I know him well, and could detect him in any of his various disguises, priest or wizard, soldier or clerk. You must bring him to judgment for this crime, if there is justice in the city of Metz."

"You forget, noble Jeanne," said the magistrate respectfully, "that, according to this story, if we are to credit it, the Italian acted only in self-defense; and that the real criminal lies here, soon to be past

earthly justice, but suffering only the just penalty of his deeds."

"David a criminal!" exclaimed Claude indignantly. "A kinder heart never beat;" then she cast an appealing glance at her husband, and added, "our house is open to him; is it not, Robert? There is a chance, they say, of his recovery."

"I have the first claim to show the charity of the good Samaritan," interposed De Metz. "I have already made the offer to receive him, feeling it upon my conscience that my rescue availed so little. My sister is a gentle nurse, and I have an aged aunt who is wonderfully skilled in simples and unguents. Let him be carried to my house at once. It is within easy distance."

"It may be well to accept this offer," said Des Armoises to the magistrate; "I can answer for the care he will receive with my friends."

"I owe him more than I can pay," said Claude. "I cannot give him up."

"My house is always open to you, madam," said De Metz. "My sister already loves you, and will feel her task lightened if you will condescend to share it with her."

Claude fixed a thoughtful gaze upon him. "Your sister has a face like an angel," she said. "I will trust her as I would not another. But the task, I fear, will

not be a long one;" and she turned aside to hide her tears.

The interest which the famous Pucelle manifested in this affray and its victim lifted it out of the category of ordinary street brawls into an importance which made the magistrate hesitate to commit himself too hastily to a course which might have far-reaching consequences. The name of the Marshal de Retz was sufficient to impose deliberation upon any action which was likely to concern his interests; and time, the justice reflected, was likely to prove a valuable coadjutor in this case, by removing the principal offender to the bar of a higher judgment, and allowing the escape of the other, of whom the city was well rid, if in truth he were a wizard, one of a class whom the justice of Metz, following the example of the Constable of France, had long held in particular abhorrence. It seemed expedient, therefore, to postpone any active measures looking to the pursuit and arrest of the Italian; and the crowd dispersed as rapidly as it had gathered, disappointed by the tameness of the event.

Later, in the course of the same night, the state bed in Jean Gugnot's spare chamber at Marville received as occupant a man who flung himself exhausted beneath its glittering coverlet after removing torn and mud-stained garments, and stripping from the upper part of his body a corselet of Milan mail formed of fine links

of steel of exquisite pliability and strength of texture. "The prudent man can laugh at fate," he said to himself, smiling ; "and sagacity is so rare a quality that it is accounted sorcery."

CHAPTER XIV.

A DEED OF SALE.



CONTRASTED with the melancholy night without, the warmth and brightness of their hearth-fire welcomed Claude and Robert with grateful cheer. The polished oaken rafters, the cornices and wainscoting, and the fluted pilasters of the mantle-piece, gave back dancing reflections which pervaded the room with the gayety of multiplied sources of light, including the rounded surfaces of some ancient suits of armor set up about the hall in empty semblance of the departed knights who had worn them. Upon the wall hung the weapons they had used, — sword, spear, and battle-axe, — each with its history of blood. Here was a Damascus blade which Lord Raoul had wrested from a Saracen whose head he straightway smote from the shoulders; there was the dented sword with which Lord Charles, then a youth, had spilled much Flemish blood in the charge under Clisson's command at Rosbecque.

“Thank God for the peace of solitude,” exclaimed

Robert, flinging himself upon the settle at his wife's side, where she had seated herself in front of the hearth, shivering and holding out her hands to the blaze. "Why was I so mad as to invite the invasion of our happiness by a chattering crowd who can add nothing to our contentment, and who bring in their train only confusion and disaster. I intend now to carry you off to Thichiemont, order the drawbridge raised, and a guard at outlook to shoot down a new-comer without question or quarter."

"Nothing would please me better," replied Claude in a tremulous voice, "unless it were to go with you to some distant land where no sound of a familiar voice could reach us."

"You are unnerved by this night's sad event," said Robert sympathetically. "It was for your sake as well as my own that I refused your request to give shelter to the unfortunate minstrel; for I feel that we should defend our happiness, while we may, from a cloud."

"This wicked François brings trouble wherever he goes. Here is the letter which he brought me from the marshal. You must read it."

"You said that David brought the letter."

"Yes, he had it from François to deliver; and it was doubtless in regard to this that the quarrel arose; so that in reality David gave his life for my sake."

“I do not comprehend that, for David was the first aggressor.”

“The actual truth can never be known,” said Claude in an agitated voice; “read the letter which I warn you will not please you.”

“To the noble lady Jeanne Des Armoises, respectful greeting from her former companion in arms, the Marshal de Retz:—

“I entreat of you for the love you bear France to send me at once upon receipt of this, the sum of a thousand crowns, with which I mean to equip a company for the king’s service in Poitou. Since you will not come in person to the war, you can do no less than give the aid I ask to subsidize a troop which shall be called by the name of the Pucelle, and fight under her banner, and thus bring to our cause the spirit which led to victory at Orleans and Troyes. Lacking any sign from you, the people murmur that you have forsaken them. Do not deny me. Remember your vow.”

The letter ended with formal assurances of respect, and was signed with the name of Gilles de Laval.

Robert mechanically repeated the last words. “Your vow, what is that?” he asked.

“To live unmarried, and devote myself to the cause of France,” she said.

“And your sweet perfidy must cost me a thousand crowns,” replied Robert. “So be it. To-morrow we will ride to Haraucourt, and conclude a sale of lands to which I have long been urged, but never would give

consent, since I was unwilling to mulct my heirs of acres long descended in our line from father to son. Collard de Failly, a rich squire of bourgeois extraction, has long cast covetous eyes upon that quarter of Haraucourt which adjoins his estate. He has sued in vain to me, as to my father, for the chance to purchase it. My change of tone will please him well."

Claude flung her arms about her husband's neck, and wept upon his bosom in the reaction of relief from the tension of her fears; but the consciousness of the lie which she had perfunctorily spoken in answer to his question, and the thought of the double deceit which had won from him such generous consent, gave bitterness to her tears.

She did not know all that it cost Robert to relinquish a purpose so dear to him as the improvement of his inheritance for the sake of those who should come after him, and also of those who held their lands at his pleasure, and whose welfare was contingent upon his decision. She was not aware that her husband lay sleepless at her side until daybreak, debating the question how he could best fulfil his promise to her, and at the same time protect the interests of his feudal tenants.

History keeps no record in its time-worn archives of the blood and tears, the heart-throbs, crimes, treacheries, and stratagems, which have indirectly contrib-

uted to the results which it notes down, and lays aside for the perusal of future generations, who, if they have illumined eyes, may read between the lines words of prophetic adjuration which can move the dry bones of dead facts to conscious life.

A yellow manuscript still preserves the record of a sale of a portion of the land of Haraucourt in these words : —

“We, Robert des Harmoises, knight, lord of Thichiemont, and Jeanne du Lys, the Pucelle of France, lady of the said Thichiemont, my wife, licensed and authorized by me, Robert above named, to agree and accord in all that follows, make known to all to whom these presents may come that we conjointly together and with a common consent and each of us by himself and for both, have sold, ceded, and transported to the honorable person, Collard de Failly, squire, living at Marville, and to Poinsette, his wife, the fourth part that we have and may have . . . in all the town, limits and confines of Haraucourt,” etc.

“Witnessed by our dear and great friend, Jeande Thoneletil, Lord of Villette, and Saubelet de Dun, Provost of Marville, who certify that it was made and done in the year of grace 1436, in November, 7th day.”

After the conclusion of the sale which had kept them a week at Marville, Des Armoises and his wife made a pilgrimage to Thichiemont, which, in the chill November weather, was a dreary solitude of dun meadows, lowering skies, and frozen wastes,

traversed only by the wild marsh fowl and their kindred of the woods.

The creatures of the wilderness had nothing now to fear from old Nicole, whose advancing infirmities kept him within doors in a state of perpetual revolt against his destiny and the conditions of the universe, which made him less than ever an agreeable companion.

What had been a mere humorous suggestion now seemed to Des Armoises a delightfully feasible scheme; and, with Claude's willing consent, the stay at Thichiemont lengthened into a winter's sojourn. Storms, snow, and ice kept the two as landlocked prisoners in the gray old tower, whose mighty walls resisted the northern blast, and whose vaulted rooms, chilly in the summer time, afforded a snug shelter when the fires roared in the chimneys, heavy tapestries were drawn over the narrow windows, and thick carpets covered the floors.

Although Nicole secretly rejoiced that Thichiemont, after years of alienation, should serve once more as home to the family whose earliest domain it had been, the habit of the grumbler would not permit him to accept the situation without criticism. Being the stiffest of conservatives, it seemed to him an unpardonable innovation that the lord and lady of Thichiemont should thus immure themselves, content

with the service of a few domestics, and no society but their own.

“It is a thing unheard-of,” he said to André Gosson, who had braved the weather, under the spur of a consuming curiosity to learn the truth of the affairs at Thichiemont. “No man in his senses would act as he does. To my mind it is as plain as a pikestaff that he is under the power of enchantment. They say that she was twice accused of witchcraft, and only escaped the flames at Rouen by the arts of magic. I have no doubt, that, on some of these dark nights, she may leave my lord sleeping while she takes the form of a wolf to roam in the forest. Yesterday at midnight I heard one howl in most unearthly fashion, and my blood ran chill at the sound.”

“I have heard it said that she deals in black magic, and has stolen the shape of the Maid of Orleans to seduce my lord’s affection,” replied Gosson; “but this I find it hard to credit. Still less can I believe her to be a were-wolf. She has a winning smile, and, to my mind, appears to be a good woman.”

“Trust no woman for appearance’s sake,” responded Nicole. “They are all arch-traitors where men are concerned.”

“But what particular charges can you make against her?” asked Gosson.

“Look at the dreariness of Thichiemont at this

season," replied Nicole. "Consider the emptiness of our larder since the roads are impassable, the servants indolent, and I unable to leave the house. Then note that my lord and lady are like two children out on a holiday. They laugh and chatter from morning to night, when there is little enough cause for merriment. At other times they will sit in the same chair and read from a book, or he will read and she will listen; and, though so dull and meaningless is the tale that one page of it would set me to sleep like an opium draught, they will spend hours on it. Then they will have games of hide-and-seek, with kisses for forfeits; and a surfeit of such fines they must have, and brazen they are in bestowing them before my very eyes.

"Now tell me, Gosson, as a man who has seen the world, did you ever know a young gallant with a face and form so attractive to women to sit content in a chimney-corner with a wife six months after marriage, having no thoughts for any one else, or any wish to leave her side? But, if you will listen to stories of enchantment, you will find his case not an uncommon one in knights who are bewitched by a sorceress like Melusina, and kept weeks and months with her in some grotto or desert island."

Gosson reflected with his head on one side, while he held a glass of wine up to the light to catch the

sunbeams like a garnet gem. "Love is a thing that lasts longer in some cases than others," he said. "Six months of kisses when I was young could not tire out my liking for them."

"I never knew a wedded couple that lived without a quarrel so long as that," muttered Nicole, determined to have the last word.

With the spring sunshine, which grew daily warmer as the hours of light invaded the period of darkness, the melting snow and ice caused troublesome freshets in the neighborhood of Thichiemont. The race-course by the mill was full of floating ice-cakes, which threatened the safety of the ancient construction where the farmers of the district for years had ground their wheat and barley. The peasants turned out to the assistance of the miller and his men. Some of the wretched thatched cottages on the lower banks of the stream were already under water; and their inhabitants had abandoned their miserable possessions to the mercy of the waves, taking refuge upon a hill near by, from which they viewed the scene of destruction with the composure of fatalists trained in the expectation of calamity as the rule of life.

Among the men who stood knee-deep in the flood which covered the meadows, directing the work of rescue in the cow-sheds and poultry yards of the

more prosperous cultivators, the peasants recognized the Lord of Thichiemont.

"'Tis a good man," said a woman who sat upon a rock with a child at her breast, and three half-naked youngsters clinging to her skirts. "See him yonder with a chicken-coop under his arm, and a kid flung over his shoulder."

"Aye, he will save the animals of those who have them to pay rent with," answered her husband with a harsh laugh. "Our bits of duds may go at the devil's will, and no word said."

"They're not worth the counting," replied the wife. "There goes the baby's cradle you hollowed from a log."

"Logs are plenty, and so are babies, God help us," said her sister-in-law, who sat rocking herself back and forth in bodily pain and mental anguish.

A servant wearing the badge of the family at the Tower approached the group with a supercilious air, as if reluctant to deliver his message. "My lord says that those who are left homeless are to take refuge at Thichiemont lodge, and that the wife of Louis the swineherd is to have a bed in my lady's suite of rooms, and to be attended in her need by the midwife from Marville, who has been bespoken for my lady for the coming month."

"God in heaven!" cried the woman, bursting into tears.

“Aye, ’tis a good man!” exclaimed her brother-in-law with an oath. “May my tongue be shrivelled to the roots if ever I allow the contrary.”

The floods subsided, and green things grew among the wreckage and ooze that marked their devastating course. Trees began to bourgeon in evidence of the abounding life that stirred within. The promise of an endlessly recurring hope, the triumph of joy over sorrow, this was the assurance of every expanding blossom and every bursting cocoon.

Robert walked forth at sunset with his eyes filled with joyful tears which blurred the radiant horizon into an image as vague as the vast but undefined delight which flooded his soul.

“The lady of Thichiemont has presented my lord with a fine pair of twin sons,” Nicole announced to the assembled villagers; and a hoarse shout greeted the joyful tidings, which being carried to Haraucourt by a messenger set all the bells ringing, and the chaplain to intoning a service of thanksgiving. Gifts were distributed among the tenantry of both estates, and open-air feasts were spread where all might drink the health of the young heirs and their mother. So promising an event had not been so happily celebrated within the memory of the oldest tenant.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES.



SECURE in the retirement of forest-bound Thichiemont, and defended by the mystic halo of motherhood, Claude allowed the summer days to pass without a care. The haunting shadow of her destiny was left behind in Metz, and she had no mind to revive its power by anticipation or recollection. The money procured from the sale of the lands of Haraucourt had been forwarded to the address of the Marshal de Retz, through the agency of Jean Gugnot, the silversmith and money-lender of Marville. At the same time had come the intelligence of David's death. He had lingered a few days, recovering a temporary vitality like the last flicker of the candle in its socket, and then the breath of life had suddenly gone out. With these events that chapter in her life had closed, she hoped, forever.

Father Ambrose, who had lived in retirement since Claude's marriage, had come at her request to officiate at the christening of her children. In her inter-

course with him, she could maintain the absolute sincerity which was so great a relief to her conscience, burdened by the subterfuge and diplomacy she had to practice with others. In Ambrose's presence, to be sure, a cloud was cast upon the sunniest day; for his intense consciousness of right and wrong would not permit her to forget the sin they shared, though with the arguments of skilful casuistry he maintained that the only real guilt, that of choice, was his, while she was the unhappy victim of necessity; and upon her, in this character, he poured the sweetest balm of charitable consolation.

The priest had developed into a fuller and more genial nature than that of the hermit of the past. The life of expiatory penance which he had proposed to himself as an atonement for another's sin had brought with it a more evident reward than when such sacrifices had been made for self alone. The warmth of a human affection, purified as it was from all leaven of self-seeking, drew him beyond the barren sphere of an egotistic isolation, and gave form and purpose to the vague aspirations of his soul.

Before he left Thichiemont, where his stay was brief, he surprised Claude by declaring a resolution lately determined upon, but long in contemplation.

"I mean to leave my selfish solitude, daughter," he said, "to enter upon the work of priest in a

large city, where poverty, ignorance, and vice stretch out appealing hands for aid. I have sought and obtained the place of assistant priest in the church of St. Seglenne in Metz. Here I shall have you and your children under my care; and the children of the poor shall be mine also; and those who have no helper, whom I must seek in the dark haunts of sin. The fields lie ripe for harvest, waiting for the reaper. I wonder I have lingered so long in the wilderness. The Master spent there forty days out of three years of service; while I in three years of contemplation have not given forty days to active work." He explained the details of his scheme, and spoke of the satisfaction which he found in it.

Claude listened absently, with her smiling gaze fixed upon the cradle which contained her sleeping children.

"Oh, Metz," she exclaimed, "I hope I may never see it again, and never enter that dismal church with a murder beneath its walls. I have known happiness only in Thichiemont." Here she began to sing a crooning melody which nature taught the earliest mother when love first set itself to a tune.

Ambrose felt a momentary pang of disappointment. When he left Thichiemont he knew that the pain of parting existed only for him.

The claims of this new, absorbing mother-love

cost Robert more than one jealous moment. Life in Claude's eyes had entirely altered its proportions; to him they remained unchanged. The young Raoul and Robert were intrusive facts, not to be henceforth ignored in the scheme of existence; but to the father their importance did not predominate all else in the orderly arrangement of the universe which had preceded them. The cosmos did not on their account need to set itself to a new pattern, nor the music of the spheres require a readjustment of pitch. Some such jesting remark made to his wife came near to precipitating their first quarrel.

"A man can never understand a woman's heart," said Claude, concluding the discussion.

"Which serves to remind me, love," answered Robert, "that I have of late bitterly reproached myself that I did not urge you to have your mother with you at a time when her sympathy would be most grateful. It is not now too late. I will send for her to come at once to Thichiemont. Indeed, such would have been my course long since, if I had not known that after her return to Domrémy, she lay ill with rheumatic fever, unable to move from the bed."

Claude started, and grew pale.

"It would not do," she said hastily. "If well, the journey would make her ill again. Do not think I

need any other than yourself. O Robert! you are all the world to me."

With this followed tears, kisses, and a tenderer consciousness of mutual love.

Ambrose sat in the chair within the confessional of St. Seglenne, sheltered from the view of the worshippers in the church, but able, if he chose, to observe their coming and going through the grated aperture where the kneeling penitent poured his confession into the ear of the priest. The hour was almost over; and he was waiting for the striking of the clock which should release him, occupied meantime in the sort of musing revery which is the relaxation of mental effort. After a day of active labor among the multitude, a sustained train of meditation was less easy than in his hermitage; perhaps on this account the tone of his mind was more habitually cheerful, and the problems of life pressed less heavily upon him. The young priest of St. Seglenne had become a power in Metz. Hundreds thronged the church to hear him preach; and hearts were stirred as by the crying of the voice in the wilderness. His look and carriage showed something of the dignity of success, and a modest satisfaction in deserved applause.

At this moment a late penitent entered, and knelt

before the grating, and the priest bent his head to listen while the confession began in the prescribed manner. The penitent's voice was low, and her utterance broken and incoherent; and the tale to which the priest listened with a divided attention seemed a rambling rhapsody. The woman was young; and her features, so far as they were visible beneath her hood, were beautifully modelled, in the consciousness of which Ambrose withdrew his eyes and fixed them upon his crucifix.

"It was your sermon on the subject of the sin of Achan, father," she said, "that led me to see my duty clearly. Each one of us, you said, has in his heart an accursed thing, buried, but not forgotten, and plain in the sight of God. Since hearing your words, it has been as if a voice sounded day and night in my ears, urging me to tell the secret that I have kept hidden so long for the sake of others. But, from thinking so long upon the matter, I have confused my notion of right and wrong concerning it, and I need your counsel to strengthen me in my decision. I must first tell of the singular way in which I learned the secret.

"About a year ago my brother took into his house a man who had been foully dealt with and nearly murdered in the street. And this was not altogether out of charity, though my brother has a good heart;

but he had reason to believe that this man possessed information on a subject which he would give a fortune to be master of. The injured man recovered in a measure his consciousness and power of speech. But my brother could make nothing of any conversation with him; for in every man's face the stranger fancied he saw that of his enemy, and he would fall into a delirium of terror. Only with me he would talk reasonably, though in disjointed sentences. One evening, as I sat alone with the invalid, I saw a change in his face, which I recognized as the shadow of death. But I could not leave my place; for he held my hand, and poured into my ears a whispered story which it seemed the last wish of his life to finish. And he would renew the narrative after a pause and a sinking away that bade fair each time to be the end. In look and manner he was more rational than ever before; but the story he told was quite incredible. And through it all he took me for another, whom he addressed as Claude or Jeanne or Catherine, which were names, I found, of the same application in his fancy, and referred to the Lady Jeanne Des Armoises, whose ardent friend he was."

Ambrose started into sudden attention. "Tell me his story, daughter," he said, with an effort to restrain the tremor in his voice.

"As for that, it is nothing you will care to hear,"

she answered. "He imagined that he was a nobleman of France, Louis Boisbourdon by name, who had incurred the king's suspicion, and had been put to the torture, sewn in a sack, and thrown in the Seine. From this extremest peril he declared he had been rescued by a wizard in the pay of the Marshal de Retz, who was then a youthful knight high in favor with the king, who had no suspicion of his evil practices. The marshal, if you will believe the story, had committed a murder, which he concealed by sewing the body in a sack, marked, as was customary in criminal executions, with the words, 'Let pass the justice of the king.' On the evening of the intended execution, the marshal, then Sire de Laval, was on the bridge when the condemned man was flung into the river. In the darkness, no one noticed the boat waiting in the shadow of the piers. There was a splash, an eddy in the water, and those waiting on the riverbank lower down the stream saw the floating sack which the wizard in the boat had flung into the waves at the same time that he had withdrawn the other, out of which he rescued the miserable wreck of humanity, whom his care and skill brought slowly back to life. It was in something like these words that I heard the tale with which I would not trouble your holy ears, father, except for the solemnity of the death-bed utterance, and the strange conclusion which the

minstrel gave to it; for at the end he fixed his eyes upon me, and said: 'I have told you my secret, Catherine, in return for yours, that you may understand how closely our destinies resemble each other. It was as easy for the marshal to make a resurrected Maid of Orleans out of her living counterpart and sister, Catherine, as for him to thwart the justice of the king, and cheat the king of terrors of a victim already within his grasp. In the one case he has made a miserable, homeless wanderer out of the proudest nobleman in France. In the other, I pray God his evil purpose may be guided and overruled to secure your happiness.' Towards the last, his words came more faintly and with a greater effort, and at last ceased; and he died in my arms when I tried to lift him back upon the pillow from which he had raised himself."

The priest's voice to his own ears sounded hoarse and unnatural as he replied, "Is it possible that you can attach the slightest credibility to the delirium of a dying man, or waste a precious hour in relating it?"

"My situation is not yet plain to you, father," was the reply. "Ever since the appearance of this new Maid of Orleans some have called her a pretender, my brother Jean among the rest, and more than all; for he is that Jean de Novelonpont who was Jeanne Darc's first companion in arms, and he knew her as well as his own sister. He has from

the first declared this woman to be an impostor; but he has always maintained that it is by the power of magic that she has assumed Jeanne's form. The idea that her sister has been trained to represent her would make all clear to him. This is the clew for which he has been unconsciously searching; and I, his sister, possessing it, have defrauded him of what he would give worlds to own. It was out of pity for the Lady Des Armoises that I did it, and for the sake of her husband who has been kind to me. Let the blow come from some other hand than mine, I thought. Let their happiness last while it may. Now I feel that in concealing a lie I have shared its guilt; for you told us, father, that we should pluck the pleasant sin from our hearts though it should be like plucking out an eye, or severing the right hand. I have determined to do my duty."

"Why come to me for counsel if your decision is made?" asked the priest coldly.

"Because like a foolish woman I dread to do what I know will give pain. It is as if by a word I knew that I should bring the house upon my head. Who knows what the consequences may be? Assure me that I am right, and I shall have the strength of your words to support me."

"In all this you are wasting the energies of your soul and conscience on that which is as empty as a

bubble of air," said Ambrose. "The story you have heard is of no more consequence than the sighing of the wind. In proof of which I will tell you what few know. I was with Catherine Darc when she died, and myself received her last confession, and closed her eyes. Jeanne Darc had no other sister."

Eudeline felt a weight lifted from her soul. A sudden rush of tears filled her eyes. "How weak and foolish I must appear to you, father," she said contritely.

"You have allowed your sober judgment to give place to wild imaginings," he replied. "To regain the calm which every Christian should cherish in his soul, read daily some meditation on the lives of the saints. You will be less likely to be led astray by idle fancies. Say ten extra *Pater Nosters* before leaving the church; and now depart with my blessing. *Pax vobiscum.*"

Eudeline rose with glad alacrity, and remained for a time in prayer before the shrine of St. Seglenne; while Ambrose, rising to his feet in his narrow closet, flung his arms into the air, then clasped and wrung his hands and bent his head upon them.

"I have lost my soul for her sake," he groaned. An hour later he was kneeling in the empty church, wrestling with a despair which he knew could have no alleviation.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SWORD FALLS.



BEFORE winter came on, Des Armoises returned with his family to Metz, and the sombre old house, upon which the shadow of St. Seglenne's spire fell daily, was filled from top to bottom with the stir of joyous life.

The day upon which the twins were six months old was also that upon which Charles the Well-Served entered the capital of his kingdom; but in the calendar of the house of Des Armoises its title to importance was found in the first circumstance rather than the last.

The Marshal de Retz sent a letter to the Lady Des Armoises describing the entry into Paris:—

“The king rode in splendid attire” [he wrote], “with the dauphin at his side, and the squire who held his bridle was no other than your former squire, Jean D'Aulon. This was of course in compliment to the Pucelle, and indirectly to myself. But to offset this concession to the popular feeling, the member of the University who preached the sermon of welcome was the ex-

ecrable Nicole Midi, friend of Cauchon, and bitter persecutor of Jeanne Darc. Thus does our royal master deal out the bitter with the sweet, as if unwilling ever to show too great appreciation for the services of his friends."

The winter of 1437 and 1438 was long remembered in stricken France as one of misery and distress, when heaven itself seemed to withdraw its mercy, and the elements warred with those who were already reduced to the last extremity by the cruelty of man. Continued rains had spoiled the harvest, and with the advancing season the inclemency of the weather increased. Rivers were swollen, lowlands flooded, and villages swept away; while their inhabitants, if they escaped the waves, perished by hunger. Pestilence and famine stalked through the land; hungry wolves howled in the streets of Paris; and bandits who had less mercy than the wolves ravaged the country.

A petition for aid was addressed to the king, and pitiful indeed was this *Complaint of the Poor Laborers*; but when did Charles give succor to those who relied upon him? and how could the weak and vacillating monarch repress the ravages of the brigands who were his own captains of war?

One April morning the sun, breaking through the clouds that hung low over the valley of the Moselle, revealed a *désolate* landscape where shallow lakes

reflected its light from what should be the undulating surface of cultivated fields. The high roads in the neighborhood of Metz were a succession of gullies and pitfalls, which the soldiers from the several fortresses were deputed to repair, giving travellers such aid as they required.

Over one of these difficult and uneven roadways, Robert Des Armoises was approaching the city on his return from Thichiemont, where he had been summoned by the tidings of a disastrous flood, the report of which was so far from being exaggerated that the reality which he encountered exceeded his expectations. He found that the village was under water, scores of lives had been lost, and a shallow sea stretched where the marshes had been on every side of Thichiemont lodge. To enter the abode of his ancestors, it had been necessary to set forth upon an extemporized raft, propelled by two stout peasants with long poles in their hands, and landing at the inner courtyard, to cross the wet paving-stones in water up to the ankle.

Old Nicole received his lord with a jeremiad of woes which he poured forth unceasingly in the ears of a listener whose sympathy was assured; for the sorrows which weighed most heavily on the heart of the faithful servitor of the house of Thichiemont were those concerning its future as revealed by a

prophecy whose verity none could question. Nicole's father and grandfather had known it in their day, and none could say how far back its origin might be traced.

“When ships shall ride at Thichiemont tower
That name shall cease forever more.”

So ran the lines which Nicole declared had not ceased to sound in his ears since he observed the waters of the lagoons rising slowly but surely where water had never been before.

“In my grandfather's time,” he said, “the marshes were only green meadows crossed by brooks, where cows could pasture; and in his father's memory, Thichiemont had often been put to hardship for lack of water, the springs in the meadow not being full enough to supply the castle and the crowds that then frequented it. Lord William used to laugh, and declare that, according to the prophecy, the line of his descendants would perpetually endure. But,” concluded the old man with a sigh, “that which is to be must come, and none can hinder it.”

Des Armoises tried to divert his steward's mind from its melancholy prepossessions, but without avail; and he left him still maundering and shaking his head over the certain downfall of the race he had served so long, and whose fate he meant to share; for nothing

would induce him to exchange his dismal quarters for others more secure and commodious.

Robert left Thichiemont with spirits clouded by the distress and suffering which he had been able only in part to alleviate. His unfulfilled intention of draining the marsh-lands recurred to him less as a salve to his conscience than as a cause of regret for a lost opportunity; for it seemed to him that every life that had been cut off in its prime could be laid to the charge of his neglect.

When he expressed this idea to his friend, the Sire de Villette, whom he met in Marville, that gentleman laughed loudly at his scruples, and berated him for what he called his womanish sentimentality. "What matter a score or two of peasants drowned," he said. "It is an accident like any other; and happier for them, no doubt, since their souls, if they have souls, are secured by church and priest whose faithful servants they were, and their bodies are at rest. As for imagining that your duty requires you to stand in the place of Providence, and bear the blame for disasters that come in the course of nature, that were too absurd a magnifying of your responsibilities. So tender a conscience, my lord, will carry you no farther than to the nearest monastery."

Robert took his friend's rebuke in good part, realizing that he who possesses ideals higher than his fel-

lows must keep his own counsel, or endure reproach as a troublesome fanatic. He pressed on his journey eager to be at home, and feeling his heart expand with satisfaction at the first sight of the spires of the city rising above its walls, the dark masses of towers and houses girdled by the shining rivers, whose bridges hardly served to span the swollen waters.

Urged by his impatience, he left the safer road, and skirting the city on the river side, climbed the hill that led to the Moselle gate. No other horseman had been bold enough that day to attempt the passage of loose stones, rain-filled rivulets, and treacherous mire into which the late storms had converted the ascent; and the gatekeeper watched him curiously as he passed. As he approached his house Des Armoises was conscious of the sudden causeless apprehension which comes to the returning traveller whose anxious affection makes him aware that all the joy of life hangs on a thread which the shears of Atropos can sever in a moment's fatal chance. To his fancy the house had an unfamiliar look, and the servant who ran to hold his bridle stared at him with inquisitive scrutiny.

"Are all well?" he asked quickly. "Is your mistress within?" and, although he received an affirmative reply, he was conscious of a certain reservation in the tone of it which added to his vague concern.

His wife was alone; and when she saw him she ran forward with an eager exclamation, but stopped at a little distance, holding herself aloof, and looking at him with a penetrating gaze which seemed to question his inmost thoughts. "What is it, Jeanne?" he cried with a sinking heart. "Where are the children? Has anything happened to their hurt?"

"My love, my love!" she exclaimed, flinging herself upon his breast, and returning his kiss with passionate tenderness. "The children are well. They are now with my mother, who cannot let them go a moment from her sight."

"Your mother here?" he asked in surprise.

She grew pale, and her lips trembled as she asked, "You have heard nothing?"

He shook his head. "Tell me what has chanced."

At this moment a shadow fell across the threshold; and Jean de Metz entered, unannounced, with a grave face and contracted brow, like one who comes as a friend into a house of mourning. At the sight of him Claude's expression changed into a convulsive look of fear and hatred. "He is your enemy, Robert," she said. "Avoid him, and believe nothing that he says."

Des Armoises turned a frowning brow upon the intruder. "What is your business here, Novelonpont?" he asked. "I am weary from my journey, and have no time nor wish to welcome visitors."

De Metz gave him a pitying look. "I will stay only till my unhappy task is done," he answered. "Speak, Lady Des Armoises, or, if you choose, give me leave to tell the story."

Robert, turning in surprise from one to the other, saw in his wife's expression, as she faced Novelonpont, such abject entreaty that no spoken words could have added to the appeal. "Spare me," her eyes implored.

"What is the meaning of this?" cried Des Armoises. "How dare you, De Metz, terrify my wife by your unfriendly and threatening manner?"

"Truth must out," answered Novelonpont in a hollow voice. "My poor friend, you have been wofully deceived, as we all have been, by a pretender set up by that wicked man, the Marshal de Retz, to assume Jeanne Darc's place and character. The amazing success of this imposture was made possible by the close resemblance of the two sisters, and the prevalent belief that Catherine Darc died long since. On the contrary, Jeanne's death at Rouen is now an established fact, and this woman, your wife, is her sister Catherine."

Robert stood like a man who receives a mortal blow; for his eyes, fixed on his wife's face, read in the guilt and anguish visible there the confirmation of these words.

"Leave us, cruel man, since you have done your worst," cried Claude, wringing her hands; and Novelonpont, with a glance at his friend's blanched and stricken countenance, obeyed.

A silence fell between the two, broken only by the sobbing cry with which Claude cast herself at her husband's feet, embracing his knees in a mute appeal for mercy, while he stood for a moment, rigid and motionless, as if suddenly turned to stone; then, thrusting her aside with an inarticulate exclamation, he staggered to a seat, bent his head upon his hands, and sat staring into vacancy with eyes that saw only the crumbling ruins of his palace of enchantment, and beheld in his wife's prostrate form a detected Lamia, cowering in the shame of her serpent change.

"Forgive me, forgive me, Robert," she entreated. "The marshal forced me by the fear of death to take Jeanne's place and name. A hundred times it has been in my mind to tell you the truth; but again and again I feared to risk your anger. If you knew all as it happened, you would forgive me as my brothers did. Be patient, love, and I can make you understand that in all this I have been the victim of necessity, without power to resist that which I hated from my soul."

Her voice trembled and died into silence, for she realized the hopelessness of the appeal. It was as if

an impalpable wall had suddenly been erected between her and her husband; and through it voices sounded as mere echoes, the clasp of hands became a ghostly contact, and nothing more was real except the pain that gnawed at the heart of each, remorselessly and without chance of alleviation.

“God,” exclaimed Robert, “why could I not have died before I felt this blow?”

Claude knelt before him with her face buried in her hands, praying to an offended God for an impossible succor, so it seemed to her saddened fancy. Often as she had pictured this moment in the certainty that discovery must some day come, she had never, until now, realized the inevitable failure of every support to the soul that does not rest on truth.

Following an unnoticed tap on the door, Father Ambrose entered with a bent head and a dejected air; and at the sight of him Robert started from his stupefaction into a mood of furious indignation.

“Here comes the chief offender, the arch traitor,” he said. “If you were not a priest, unworthy as you are to bear that name, you should answer with your life for your share in this foul conspiracy against me. I can suspect, though I do not know half the baseness of your position as a spy in my house under the command and in the service of the Marshal de Retz; for

at this moment for the first time I begin to perceive your share in the villainy that was plotted when the marshal was at Domrémy, and you met him secretly at night, unnoticed by any but the village clown, who in view of the result has proved himself wiser than the rest of us. ‘Say Catherine to Ambrose, and see if he will not blush,’ those were his sapient words; and I rebuked him for his suspicion of a holy man, and like an easy dupe swallowed every bait prepared for my credulity. My grandfather starved his wife to death for suspected infidelity; what infidelity can compare with this daily and hourly conspiracy against me? How can you dare to look me in the eyes, Catherine Dare, remembering with what measure of treachery and deceit you have rewarded my love and confidence? You are guilty of the foulest treason; you should suffer the traitor’s death; but I will condemn you only to the torments of your own conscience, and the shame of the world’s scorn. Leave my house, and let me never more see the devilish beauty of your false, seductive face. Your children may return with your mother to Domrémy. I am willing to entrust them to her care on condition that they do not know you as their mother, and are kept in ignorance of all that concerns their parentage. My name shall never survive this disgrace. Old Nicole’s prophecy is fulfilled.”

He left the room without waiting for a reply, and

for a moment Claude stood gazing after him in silence ; then with a cry of lamentation like that once heard in Ramah, she fell at Father Ambrose's feet, and unconsciousness mercifully came to the relief of her tortured heart and brain.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PROMISE.



N the anteroom Robert came upon Novelonpont, who was pacing there with gloomy brow, the picture of a man with whom success has all the quality of defeat. He approached his friend, and laid a timid hand upon his arm.

“I am ready to offer you what consolation I can for the grief that I have brought upon you,” he said. “It is by my means that the truth has come to light. Being sure that we had to do with a work of enchantment, it occurred to me that no one could more readily expose the deception than the virtuous mother of Jeanne Darc, who, on one pretext or another, had all this while been kept at a distance from her supposed daughter. I therefore arranged that Isabel should meet me, unknown to her sons, in Toul; and from that place I brought her with me by boat to Metz, a dangerous journey, since the freshet has obliterated all landmarks; but by the providence of God we reached here in safety. Our coming was kept a secret,

as I had hopes of surprising the truth from the unmasked sorceress; and I contrived accordingly that we should be introduced unannounced into the presence of the lady Des Armoises; but the result disconcerted my expectations. Isabel gazed for a moment, and then ran forward crying, 'It is my daughter Catherine; not Jeanne, but Catherine.' Taken thus completely by surprise, your unhappy wife so far forgot herself, in the suddenness of her vexation, as to raise her hand against her mother. She struck her, crying, 'Woman, you lie;' and the next moment she broke down and fell a-weeping with grief and shame."

Robert groaned as he said, "For God's sake, leave me to myself, Novelonpont. I can bear no more; I am hard beset."

"Courage," said Novelonpont sympathetically, "your happiness is lost, but your honor need not be. For your sake I am willing to keep the secret, and to trust Jeanne's fame a little longer to the keeping of her unfortunate sister. I am loath to bring disgrace upon the family of the Maid of Orleans by allowing this to become an open scandal. Let Catherine retire from public view, and end her days in a convent. So would the interests of all concerned be best secured."

"I make no objection," answered Robert. "Nor am I likely to make open proclamation of this dis-

honoring discovery. Arrange it according to your wish."

So saying, he released himself from De Metz's detaining hold, and retired to his study, where he closed and barred the door against all comers.

Novelonpont went to take counsel with the priest, having no doubt of his co-operation in a scheme which would be in natural agreement with his prepossessions; but, to his surprise, he found Father Ambrose full of a new idea, for which he claimed divine inspiration. It had been revealed to him in a vision, which he had not until now been able to interpret, that the false Jeanne was to go to Rome, receive the blessing and absolution of the Pope, thereafter to set forth upon a new crusade against the enemies of France, in which she was promised the assistance of the saints, and assured that the mantle of her sister should fall upon her shoulders.

"Can you not see the hand of God in this matter, overruling the evil purpose of a man of sin, and making him but the instrument of the divine will?" said Ambrose, with eager conviction. "The new Jeanne has been raised up in place of the old. Born in the same house, nourished at the same breast, wearing the same features, what should hinder her from doing the same work? The misery of her present position results from the fatal mistake she made

in yielding to the interference of her brothers, and to the alluring voice of love, and so giving up the mission to which she had been called. Happier were it for her if she might, as you suggest, find rest from effort and forgetfulness of grief in a convent; but this is a world of struggle and endeavor, in which we are not weakly to lay down our arms before the victory is won. In my vision it was plainly declared that the new Jeanne was to go to Rome, and there receive the blessing of the Pope, which would give a sanction to her mission which no one in the future could gainsay. She consents to this on one condition, a condition which shows that her heart still clings to the things of earth, and must be still further chastened by misfortune, before it can reflect the singleness of her sister's devotion. She means first to win her husband's promise of forgiveness as contingent upon the success of her undertaking. Think you that she can succeed in this?"

Novelonpont shook his head. "The Sire Des Armoises would have no faith in your vision, and no confidence in her resolve," he answered. "He is cut to the heart by the treachery that has been practiced against him, and feels the bitter anger of a betrayed and disappointed man."

"But you, my friend," said Ambrose, "you, who have such kindness for the memory of Jeanne Darc, and

such sympathy for all that relates to her, surely you will not oppose her sister in the attempt to follow in her footsteps, and to complete her work for France."

De Metz hesitated. He was predisposed by the temper of his mind to credit the marvellous, and to welcome all that appealed to his lively imagination and deep religious sense; in this spirit he had been the first to champion Jeanne Darc. To him Ambrose's explanation seemed inherently probable, and not to be lightly set aside because it involved inconvenient consequences. That it must bring to him the relinquishment of the settled purpose which he had so long pursued might be only a just correction of the fallacy upon which it was based. The disconcerting surprise of Catherine Darc's reappearance prepared him to admit his own fallibility, and to follow the guidance of other conclusions than his own.

"I will consider the matter," he replied. "I am ready to do what is right if I can find where the truth lies."

"I have no uncertainty as to that," answered Ambrose. "I have never doubted the heavenly vision when it has had the clearness of visual evidence. In this case I have seen Jeanne Darc as I was wont to see her in the first year of my priesthood. It was her voice that bade her sister undertake the journey to Rome."

"These things are beyond my understanding," replied De Metz. "It may be well to leave them to the test of time; and I consent to keep the secret of the new Jeanne's identity for the present, stipulating that when her mission is fulfilled she shall assume her proper character as the successor and sister of Jeanne Darc, leaving the glorious image of the true Messiah of France undimmed by rivalry or the changes of time,—the unique example of heroic womanhood."

"Agreed," said Ambrose eagerly. "No one more than myself desires to rid our enterprise of the stigma of a lie. When the Pope absolves us from that sin, I hope that the truth can be made known without loss or shame."

These two high-minded conspirators then went their way, leaving the house of Des Armoises in the shadow of its grief, which was broken by a ray of cheer only in the nursery, where Isabel Romée sat with her grandsons on her knees, satisfying the yearning of her long-thwarted affection by lavishing upon them the fondest blandishments of maternal love. Here, too, a tragic gloom was cast, when Claude, entering, flung herself at her mother's feet, and related the hopelessness of her estrangement from her husband. When the twilight had fallen, and the children had been laid in their canopied cradles, the two women sat hand in hand

engaged in a low murmur of conversation, in that sympathy of heart with heart which is possible only between mother and daughter.

“Come home with me, Catherine,” said Isabel. “There you may be safe and happy. You can have your children with you, and that will be enough for your contentment; while they will be the surest means of winning your husband back to you. As for all this talk of visions and pilgrimages, I have no patience with it. I do not mean to lose you a second time, or have you bring the vengeance of church and state upon you as Jeanne did. One daughter sacrificed to the cause of France is enough.”

“How happy I should be if I might agree to that,” answered her daughter. “But Robert must first give his consent, and that he never will; nor will he return to me. His love has turned to scorn and hatred, while mine for him is so undying that to regain his affection I would give up my children, undertake the pilgrimage to Rome barefoot if need be, fight in the wars, and do all that Jeanne did, if I might win the respect and reverence he gave her. Do you think, mother, that there is any chance of his forgiveness?”

“To be sure; why not?” responded Isabel. “One can have but little affection for husband or wife who is ready at the first discovered fault to give it up.”

“Robert’s door is locked against me,” said Claude;

“I cannot gain speech with him, and I know not what design he may be harboring against me. O mother! I am the most unhappy of women, to have possessed a heart so noble, and to have lost it through the fault of my unhappy fate.”

Isabel would not consent to view the situation in its most hopeless aspect; and being wearied with her journey and the trying events of the day, she went to her bed, counselling her daughter to do the same, trusting to Providence, and to the better cheer which the morrow might bring.

When the house was dark and silent, Claude stole, as she had done many times before, to the door of her husband's study, where, after tapping softly for admission, and being denied by a persistent silence, she sank upon the threshold, with her forehead upon the oaken panel of the door, and her hands clasped listlessly in her lap. She heard her husband's movements within; he opened drawers and boxes, sorted and arranged papers, and then for hours maintained an enigmatic silence. Had he fallen asleep, or was he like herself sunk in a trance of hopeless melancholy? As the night waned she dozed, and in her dreams was happy and forgiven; then she awoke to the consciousness of her aching heart, chilled frame, and stiffened limbs, and waited in motionless suspense for a movement in the room within. Hearing nothing,

a sudden terror seized her. She imagined her husband dead by his own hand, his beautiful face distorted by the last agony, and his glassy eyes fixed upon her with a look of undying reproach. At the horrible fancy she cried out in alarm; and in reply a footfall sounded, the door was unbarred, and Robert stood before her, and made a motion for her to enter. She sprang to his side, and attempted to clasp his arm, but he repulsed her with a look of scorn.

"Sit yonder," he said, pointing to a chair, "and tell me what you may have to say in your own defense. The worst criminal is permitted that; and in justice to myself I should know the truth of your position, if truth is a word that can even remotely be applied to you."

Thus urged to speech, words for the moment forsook the unhappy Claude. With clasped hands and streaming eyes she flung herself at her husband's feet, sobbing incoherent entreaties for love and pardon. Robert waited with an air of forbearance until she had recovered herself; then he took her hand and led her to a chair, standing before her, and looking down upon her with a face of anguish.

Deceived by the calm of his manner into a quick, delusive hope, Claude began her story with words made eloquent by emotion; and Robert listened, feeling each sentence as a sword-thrust, to the strange

story of the double life which had been so fair in outward seeming while within it was a festering crime.

"Forgive me for our children's sake, Robert," she concluded, "and for the sake of all the joy that we have known and may know again now that this terrible secret is no longer a barrier between us. Let us go far away, to Constantinople or the distant East, where no one will know our past, and where we can begin a new life, free from its memory. I will give you such love and devotion as will make you happy, Robert. Years of happiness shall atone for this day of grief."

"You appeal to our love, our children," he exclaimed; "God in heaven! they are the witnesses to your damnation."

"Is there no hope?" she asked with trembling lips.

"None," he replied; "my honor is too sorely wounded, and for that the Marshal de Retz shall be held to strict account. He cannot long escape punishment at my hands. One object and one interest remains to me in life, — revenge."

"If you blame him, can you not pity and excuse me?"

"No; for by appeal to the protection of the king or the church, you could have escaped his power. He

has many enemies who have long been seeking a pretext for his destruction."

"How could I, an ignorant and defenseless girl, know that?"

"You could have trusted your secret to me, to De Metz, to any brave man who would have undertaken your defense."

"But Father Ambrose counselled patience, and the Abbess Hilda assured me that I was doing the will of God in imitating my sister's life and mission."

"Lies which your conscience should have taught you to discredit."

"But if I had told the truth, you would have withdrawn your love and admiration from me, hating me then as you do now for the imposture."

"I know not," he answered musingly. "If you had told me that night at Arlon I should have left you in horror, for then I loved you as one worships a saint; but if you had trusted me with your secret when first I met you in Marville, I am not sure that my heart was so deeply engaged but that I should have been willing to relinquish my pleasing delusion with a passing regret, such as we give to the fading visions of youth, and I might have found interest in championing your cause against the marshal, and in pursuing him, as I shall now, with discovery and destruction."

"But you would never have loved and wedded me as my true self," she urged.

"I should at least have been your friend," he answered.

"That would not have sufficed to compensate for what I should have lost," she said. "It was my love for you that made it impossible for me to put all to the test, as many a time my conscience prompted me to do. You cannot guess the depth of my love, since yours fails at the first strain put upon it. No crime that you could commit could turn my heart from you. It will be yours while life and thought remain to me."

Her tone grew in dignity with the resignation of despair; and Robert's mood softened from implacable resentment to a compassionate regret. Once having yielded to the promptings of sympathy, he began to realize the situation from a new point of view, — that of the loving woman with whom affection counts for more than duty or ease of conscience. Looking back over his past life, he wondered whether he had the right to fling a stone at her for this. Before his nature had been touched and exalted by devotion to the inspiring character of the Maid of France, he had been the slave of a consuming passion whose wreck had left the whole world void; and on the day of his visit to Domrémy, destiny had held his future bal-

anced evenly between the paths of righteousness and the by-ways of profligacy. The hand of the Pucelle had turned the scale. Grief for the loss of the bright image that had filled his heart, and for the fading of the dream that had been a glory and a joy, now that the first shock of agonized dismay was over, became a softer and more tender melancholy; and he realized that he had never possessed in other than a visionary form the love and companionship of Jeanne of France.

He recalled a hundred vexing suspicions, unsubstantial as air, but tending to the undermining of his belief in her. In place of the transcendent spirituality he had looked for, he had recognized an earthly and seductive charm to which he had yielded half unwillingly as to a siren's song. He had been conscious of a baffling mystery and reserve, and a lack of confidence and sympathy, which defeated his dearest wishes. The vague unrest which clouded his happiness had been forgotten only when he had learned to accept a lower, more commonplace contentment than that which he had dreamed of.

He sighed, and leaned his head upon his hand. "My disappointment is that of a man who grasps at a bubble, and laments that it melts at a touch," he said. "I have been an easy dupe, and have myself to blame for the grief that has fallen upon me. Let us part as friends, Catherine Darc, burdened by a com-

mon weight of woe, which neither can help the other to endure. My lot, indeed, is happier than yours; for a man has the world before him, and, having marred his life, may reconstruct it as he will. I shall in time perhaps bury in oblivion the gnawing sorrow which is more severe than that which I once suffered by a woman's betrayal, only because in this case I believed my seducer to be a saint, while in the other instance I knew her to be a beautiful demon."

"Why must you cast me off, if you have any kindness for me?" she sobbed, feeling a new pang of jealous misery at his words, and bewildered by the change in his mood, whose pensive *régret* brought him no nearer to her than his anger had done. "Can you not acknowledge me to be your wife, and the mother of your children? Am I not worthy to be their devoted nurse, and your humble slave?"

A deep frown appeared between his brows. "It is the thought of what this dishonor means to them that maddens me," he replied.

Claude rose to her feet, and stood with her hands clasped tightly together, and her frame nerved for one last appeal.

"Listen, Robert," she said. "If my children live to know their mother as one whose deeds have won her world-wide fame; if all praise me as the worthy successor to my sister Jeanne; if the story of my life

from this day forth is only the continuation of her history; if I am as religious, as devoted, as successful in the wars, — will you promise to receive me again as your wife and the worthy mother of your children? ”

The genuineness of her emotion touched him; and he looked with pity at her grief-stricken face, illuminated for the moment by a transfiguring hope.

“On that condition, I promise it,” he said, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice which Claude did not detect; for, grasping at this slight consolation, she flung herself before him, and kissed his hands, wetting them with tears.

Robert withdrew himself with an involuntary movement.

“I cannot yet forget what you have been in my thought of you. I cannot let you kneel to me,” he said. “Moreover, I spoke in bitter jest. It is not possible for you to fulfil this condition; and no penance to which I could condemn you could be worse than the constant struggle and the constant failure, the comparison of guilt with perfection, and the futile pursuit of an ever-deferred hope. Better to enter a convent, where no shame and reproach can follow you, and where the duties set you day by day may teach you peace.”

“Peace without you and my children!” she exclaimed. “That can only come to me when my

heart is still beneath its shroud. I will accept every hard condition in order to show you that my love is strong enough to bear any test. In the convent I would soon become to you a faded dream, and you would find some other woman, some 'beautiful demon,' with whom to console yourself; but I swear to you, Robert Des Armoises, that as long as I live you shall keep me in your memory. In spite of yourself you shall hear my name and the story of my deeds, whether they lead to success or failure, whether I conquer in the army, or, like Jeanne, suffer at the stake; and every time you hear you will remember that I was once your wife, and that I have your promise to receive me again as such on the condition you have made; and you will be sure that it is my love for you, and my faith in your promise, which make the struggle possible; and some day I will come to you in triumph, and claim your love, and you will give it to me."

She ended in tears, and remained silent, with her face buried in her hands. Robert sighed, as he rose from his place to extinguish the candle that flickered in its socket. The light of dawn stole in at the window, and the birds in the tree-tops were saluting it with songs which took no account of the havoc wrought by the storm in their devastated nests. A new day had come, and new nests might be built, while the sunlight was argument enough for joy.

“To-day I shall arrange that the children return with your mother to Domrémy,” said Robert, with averted eyes.

Claude started, and pressed her hand upon her heart. “And to-day I must set out for Rome,” she said.

“You will not go alone?”

“Father Ambrose will accompany me. I must receive the absolution of the Pope for my sin in raising my hand against my mother—a sin of impatience which she readily forgave, but which must be specially atoned for before I can hope for God’s blessing on my work, so Father Ambrose says.”

“It is all folly and delusion,” exclaimed Robert impatiently. “I should be better pleased to see you turn with disgust from the old path of lying trickery, which has ended in ruin, and escape forever from the guidance of that man who has been your evil genius. Have you become so wedded to a lie that you can no longer see the value of truth as a support to the soul? If you still continue in deception, all must result for you in despair.”

“Since you forsake me, he is my only friend,” she replied. “Moreover, he is a holy man and full of the love of God, though you misjudge him and doubt his sincerity. If I do as he urges, I will be a saint, and give the rest of my life to prayer and

penance. He tells me that earthly love henceforth is sin, and that I must cast your image forever from my heart."

"In that he counsels well," answered Robert gravely; "for there is no greater grief than a delusive hope. It would be best for you to realize that all is at an end between us."

"I have your promise!" she cried, with tears in her eyes. "You cannot deny it; and I shall hold you to it."

Before the day ended, change had set its mark upon the house of Des Armoises, which stood henceforth deserted and unvisited, except by the moving shadow of the church-spire, which traced the hours upon it, like the index of an enormous dial. Early in the morning two children, in the arms of a nurse and accompanied by their grandmother, set out on the return journey by boat to Toul. Later in the day two gray-robed pilgrims with scrip and staff left the Moselle gate to seek with weary steps the seat on earth of that heavenly power which alone can loose the bonds of sin, and re-create in the soul the image of a divine innocence.

Last of all, the Sire Des Armoises departed from the home of his ancestors, leaving it empty of all but the memory of what had been; and as he rode

from its door, he turned his back forever upon his youth, that paradise of bright illusions, glorious hopes, and lofty aspirations, which fades to leave the awakened soul in conscious nakedness and desolation.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SIENA MANUSCRIPT.



N the library of the Carmelite convent at Siena, there was long preserved a manuscript written in French, and therefore not intelligible to many of the brothers, to which fact, it may be, it owed its preservation among the lives of saints and copies of the Fathers in Greek and Latin, remaining unread and untranslated, until one day a learned antiquarian disinterred it, and finding it valuable as a historical document, persuaded the prior to part with it for a good price. He was the more willing to do this, since the tone of its contents, when they were divulged to him, vexed his orthodox soul, and led him to doubt whether the friar of Lorraine, who composed it, and who had died in the odor of sanctity, should not be set down as a secret heretic whose bones should not be permitted to rest in holy ground.

The book bore the title *My Confession*, and was a record of the reminiscences of a friar, who asked

the prayers of all to whom his writing should come, as a sinner, conscious of a weight of guilt which even the absolution of the Pope had not been able to remove. It was this declaration which the prior considered to savor of heresy. The sin which appeared most heinous among those confessed by the writer was the desecration of the confessional, by making it the medium of a lying utterance, designed to shield a friend from harm; and the friar, with endless self-reproaches, styled himself an Ananias of blacker guilt than he who was stricken dead for a lie. It was this sin of deception for which the Pope had given full absolution; yet the monk complained that the guilt of it had never ceased to vex him, the more so that at the close of his life he became aware that the unsuspected motive of his actions was not as he had believed a heavenly inspiration, but earthly love for a woman whose safety and well-being had been dearer to him than the salvation of his soul. As his relations with this woman were evidently those of a Platonic friendship, disturbed by nothing of a less spiritual nature than the affection of Dante for his Beatrice, the prior, whose views on these matters partook of the laxity of his life, was not greatly shocked by this part of the confession; but for the sake of conventual discipline, which must be maintained at least in the outward appearance, he

gave the purchaser of the manuscript to understand that he parted from it willingly as from an accursed thing, not, therefore, without value for its literary merits, and the singular facts which it related concerning the false Jeanne Darc.

A fragmentary copy of this manuscript fell into the hands of a bitter enemy of France, who gladly availed himself of the monk's confession of love for the pretender to corroborate calumnious charges drawn from other sources, and to enable him to add to the injurious epithets which he, with the fine talent for invective displayed by men of the church, showered upon the head of one who had formerly incurred the suspicion of the Inquisition.

The following extract from the friar's confession may here be given:—

“When we were come to the palace of the Pope, the Holy Father received Jeanne du Lys with little delay, she being introduced by the Bishop of Padua, who had further secured for us the favor of one of the gentlemen of the bedchamber high in the Pope's favor. All being withdrawn from about us, at the command of the Pontiff, we threw ourselves on our knees and kissed his feet, confessing by turns the guilt for which we desired absolution; namely, the sin of Jeanne du Lys in raising her hand against her mother, and my own grievous fault in the abuse of the confessional, and further the sin of both in continuing the deception whereby it was commonly believed that the Jeanne Darc who had taken Orleans was come in person to offer to fight for the cause of the Vicar of Christ, when in reality it was

Catherine Jeanne Darc or du Lys, her sister, who being her very image proposed to do in her name deeds which should serve better than the true Jeanne's the cause of Holy Church, and assist in freeing the Pope from the persecutions of his enemies.

"After hearing our confession and the purpose of our coming, his Holiness granted to both of us full and free absolution for our sins, especially for any sin against the truth which we had committed or should commit, in the cause of Holy Church and the defense of the Vicar of Christ, by causing the new Pucelle to be regarded as her sister bearing the same name, which would give the soldiers greater confidence in her as their leader, and conduce to the success of her endeavor.

"Now that the object of our weary pilgrimage was fulfilled, peace should have visited our souls; but that it did not I attribute to the secret guilt of the unacknowledged motive that moved us, which was not the single-hearted devotion to the cause of his Holiness that we professed, but rather in my case an affection for Jeanne du Lys so great that I could not endure to have her discredited by her enemies; and with her such a passionate affection for her husband who had cast her off, that she would move heaven and earth to regain him.

"Thus were our minds unvisited by the consolations accorded to the true penitent.

"In battle against the Duke of Milan, Jeanne du Lys rode at the head of a troop of soldiers taken from the command of the governor of Rome, and a band of stipendiaries in the Pope's pay. She rode armed in complete mail, on a white charger, and carried a short sword and a small battle-axe. I remained in her tent engaged in prayer for her safety; not, sinner that I was, with any wish for the success of the armies of Pope Eugene IV., but with the anxious heart of one who beholds his dearest friend adventured in an unusual and desperate undertaking. Without experience of war, and without the aid of the saintly voices that lent dauntless courage to the true Jeanne, how could the pretender escape destruction?

“She returned in triumph, greeted by the acclamations of the soldiers, who saw the hand of God in the destruction of her enemies. When her squire had unarmed her and she had taken refreshment, she begged that she might be left with me to make confession and receive absolution for homicide committed in battle; and when we were alone she fell half-fainting with distress at my feet. ‘I am lost, Ambrose,’ she said. ‘My husband can never again take my hand, for it is stained with blood;’ and with tears and groans she proceeded to relate how in the thick of battle, and in terror for her life, not knowing where to turn or how to conduct herself, she drew her sword in defense against the enemy who pressed close upon her, and before she knew what had chanced, she had laid two of the foremost dead at her feet. She could not forget the sight of the welling blood, the distorted faces, and the agony of the dying; and she believed that the curse of Cain must henceforth rest upon her. Being attacked by a low fever which resulted from her distress of mind, she obtained permission from the Pope to return to France, and carry on the war against the English, to which she was urged by frequent dispatches from the Marshal de Retz. In command of the soldiers of the marshal she greatly distinguished herself in the war on the borders of Poitou and Guyenne, and was everywhere received with acclaim and reverence; until the fatal time arrived when this evil man, emboldened by success and blind to his danger, agreed to put everything to the test, and to subject the pretender to the scrutiny of the people of Orleans, and even to a meeting with the king. The result to her was shame and ruin; to me, grief and woe. Pray for me, brothers, who read this confession; for as one awakes to knowledge of an unseen gulf beneath his feet, so I learned at last my weakness, hitherto concealed and unsuspected. By the lightening-stroke of God’s revelation, it was shown me that I had kept a hopeless love for the woman hidden beneath my priestly interest in the penitent. My counsels had lead her astray; and in abetting the impos-

ture I was guilty, not only of all that my conscience had admitted, but also of a satisfaction in the sinful tie that bound us each to the other in a common conspiracy against the truth. Pity me, my brothers, and beseech God's mercy upon me ; and let each of you make the prayer of the Psalmist his own : *Lord, cleanse thou me from my secret faults.*"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LADY OF BEAUTÉ.



AGNES SOREL, in the enjoyment of satisfied ambitions and gratified vanity, was conscious of a secret vexation which clouded her serenity. She recognized a rival whose political influence threatened to eclipse her own; although her position at court was so secure that she could afford an ostentatious humility, and a generous indifference to the oscillations of the royal favor, which returned as constantly to her as the needle to the pole. Ambition, however, rather than any softer passion, was a ruling motive with the gentle Agnes, whose demure reserve hid an inflexible determination; and she was troubled by the fear that in the history of the future, in which she hoped to gain an honorable place among the statesmen of France, her fame would be overshadowed by the glory of Jeanne Darc, whose hold upon the people had never been so apparent as now, when Orleans had received her with unbounded reverence and delight.

The royal mail had brought the budget of dispatches from Orleans, describing in detail the marvellous Mystery which had been enacted in honor of her long-delayed reappearance in the city of her affection. She had come from the borders of Guyenne and Poitou in company with the Marshal de Retz, with whom she had been associated there in her campaign against the English, leaving the further conduct of hostilities in the hands of a lieutenant of the marshal; and the people of Orleans, recalling the fact that De Retz had ridden beside the Maid on her first triumphant entry into the city when she had appeared as God's angel sent to the relief of its desperate need, saw in the conjunction of the powerful nobleman and their adored heroine cause for enthusiastic rejoicing. Rich gifts were voted to the Pucelle, processions and pageants were made for her reception; but it remained for the marshal to devise a festival so superb as to be forever memorable.

In the public square, where a fountain of hippocras spouted day and night, and rich feasts were hourly spread, there was enacted a three days' performance of the *Famous Mysteries representing the Siege of Orleans*, in which countless actors, trained by long practice, reviewed the events of the famous siege in the order of their occurrence. The French and English fought hand to hand in the intrench-

ments; one by one the fortifications of the enemy were overthrown; victory followed the standard of the Maid; angels with shining wings, unobserved by the combatants, mingled with the defenders of the city, directing all to their good; while high aloft in a Paradise, represented by an upper stage blazing with gold and illuminated with wonderful colored lights, holy personages were seen, and voices sounded to encourage the heroine in her work: *Fille Dé va, va, va; je serai à ton aide.*

Choruses of angels sang triumphant pæans, when on the third day of the Mystery the final overthrow of the English was represented to the delight of the spectators. The Pucelle herself, who had watched the show from a pavilion hung with cloth-of-gold, where she sat in company with the marshal and the dignitaries of Orleans, now mounted her war-horse, and rode at the head of the mimic saviours of the city three times round its walls; while the people, moved to tears by this visible repetition of the greatest miracle of modern times, fell upon their knees in her path, and kissed her feet and the housings of her charger, and blessed God for his mercy. The festivities of the week, it was said, cost the marshal eighty thousand crowns; but his generosity to the Pucelle won him a popularity he had never before enjoyed, and which greatly disconcerted the malevolent designs of his enemies.

The fair Agnes one day sat musing in the midst of a chattering group of gay damsels who were intent on the preparations for a series of *fêtes* to be given the following week in the castle of Loches. Her revery was respected in so far that no one openly addressed her; though many sly glances and covert innuendoes were directed towards her, most of which she allowed to pass unnoticed. Suddenly her attention became alert; and without raising her eyes or changing her attitude, she listened eagerly.

“The knight of the lily will not be there, I wager,” said one, “unless we can persuade the Pucelle to come in person from Orleans to attend our *fête*; which would seem but a poor thing to her after the magnificence she has enjoyed there; greater, they say, than was displayed in honor of the king’s entrance into Paris.”

“I once asked this same melancholy knight,” rejoined a companion, “why, when he is so ardent an admirer of the Pucelle, he should make no endeavor to meet her and win her favor. He replied that he worshipped a spirit, and not an earthly being; nor would he dare to aspire so high as to hope for the love of the Maid of Orleans.”

“He might aspire even higher, if he had daring equal to his merits,” thought Agnes, while a blush mounted to her forehead. She rose, and quickly left the room.

One gay damsel sharply nudged the other with her elbow.

“I have it on the word of the Sire de Beuil that the lady of the lamb made advances to the knight of the lily, and was repulsed,” she whispered.

“What could one expect from a monkish visionary, who spends his days in meditation and his nights in prayer?” was the answer.

Charles of Valois was engaged in an interesting game of dice with his brother-in-law, the Prince of Anjou, when a perfumed note was handed to him, sealed with the device of a lamb. Charles d’Anjou discreetly withdrew his eyes while his royal brother made haste to master its contents, which, although in an unfamiliar cipher, may be thus translated:—

“Are you aware that the so-called Jeanne Darc, or du Lis, or Des Armoises, the Pucelle, has been greeted with more honor in Orleans than you in Paris; and that her renown threatens to eclipse your own? If you love me, order her immediate attendance at court, where, if she be an impostor, as some still maintain, I will soon find means to discover the fact. We have too long delayed in taking a decided course either to sanction or discredit her claims.”

Later in the same day the lady Agnes sent an invitation to the young nobleman who went by the name of Sire Roger d’Arblay, a name which every one judged to be assumed, as was also his coat of arms, a

shield *or*, bearing a single lily *gules*, with the crest, a two-handled sword, and the device, *I bide my time*.

The heralds of the court were greatly vexed by their inability to penetrate the disguise; and the ladies, while interested in the mystery that surrounded him, and enamoured of his handsome face, were displeased by his insensibility to their charms, and the eccentricity of his behavior. He declared himself to be the knight of the Pucelle, dwelling in the world as if it were a hermitage, and counting all its joys but phantom allurements which had no charm for his consecrated spirit. It was said that he had passed whole nights upon his knees before the altar of the church of St. Catherine of Fierbois, and that he had made a pilgrimage to every place in the itinerary of the Pucelle, as one might visit the stations of the Cross. Yet so shy was his nature, and so unpractical his fantastic mania, that he had never once, as he acknowledged, met the Pucelle face to face. He made no offer of his sword to her command when she undertook the siege of Mans with the troops of the Marshal de Retz; he did not visit Orleans when people for leagues around had crowded its streets to witness her re-entrance and the magnificent festivities which celebrated it.

Agnes Sorel, to whom he had been commended by the bishop of Nantes, had introduced him at court,

and looked for his gratitude and admiration as her due reward. She was much chagrined to find that his indifference was genuine, and not to be overcome. Piqued by his disdain, she attempted with the instinct of coquetry to bring him to her feet, finding it a design of more serious consequence than she had at first intended. Her volatile fancy, capricious in affairs of the heart, was impressed by a genuine admiration for a nature so different from her own as to be capable of an ideal enthusiasm.

Little by little she found herself involved in the toils which she had prepared for another; and though she would not acknowledge to herself that the satisfaction of her whim was more than a summer day's pastime, it became, for the time at least, an engrossing purpose.

The invitation which summoned the disguised knight to a conference with the chief lady of the court was not unwelcome to him, since for reasons of his own he was anxious to secure her powerful co-operation. He met her in the garden, where she awaited him in a retired spot known to be secure from intrusion, being reserved for the use of Queen Marie and the dowager-queen of Sicily, and such of their circle as they chose to make free of it.

Des Armoises, whom the reader may know by the name which he had forever discarded, found the lady

of Beauté pacing up and down a sequestered alley, with an attendant whom she immediately dismissed, allowing the young man to take his place at her side. Her countenance was grave and serene, though her color came and went as if she were secretly agitated.

“I wish to consult you, my lord,” she said, “upon an affair of such consequence that I have not breathed it to a living soul. Hoping that I may trust your friendship for me,” — Des Armoises took no advantage of the pause she offered here, and she proceeded in vexation, — “or, at least, your honor to keep sacred the confidence I give you,” — here he made a motion of assent, — “I have summoned you to this interview, not only as a mark of my regard, — insensible ingrate,” she added inwardly, — “but also out of consideration for your declared passion for the Pucelle.”

“That is not the word to describe the spiritualized adoration which I have kept as the only affection in a heart of stone,” he replied.

Agnes sighed softly. “It is the first time that I have heard you acknowledge that of which I was only too conscious,” she said. “Pray tell me, messire, how it can chance that beneath so friendly an exterior you can carry so hard a heart.”

“I will tell you,” he answered quickly. “Betrayed by a beloved wife, I placed all my affection upon the

children she had left me; and when I received the news of their sudden death by drowning, I became a desperate man. Journeying from Lorraine to Brittany in pursuit of the only object in life remaining to me, revenge, — I passed the church of St. Catherine at Fierbois; and recollecting that the Pucelle had once visited it with a miraculous result, I entered it and by chance fell asleep there. I had a vision in my slumber in which it appeared to me that a gracious being offered me an immortal love on condition that I should keep my heart free from earthly passion. The atmosphere she breathed was that of lilies intoxicating in their sweetness; and the joy of the serene light of Paradise that shone about her remained with me when I woke. It seemed that this beautiful vision had the face and form of the Pucelle, and that night upon my knees before the altar, I devoted my heart and life to her service, vowing to live henceforth as free as Sir Galahad from snares of love."

The lady of Beauté frowned, and bit her lip. "You are devising a pretty fable with a moral concealed in it, as nauseous drugs are given disguised in jelly," she said with a shrill laugh. "But I assure you that vanity deceives you if you think that I am in need of its teaching."

"Heaven bears me witness that I had no such thought," he answered gravely, with a searching glance

that caused the lady the chagrin of wounded self-esteem; and turned her fancy for him into bitter hatred.

"Tell me, at least, who is the foe you went to seek in Brittany," she said, endeavoring to recover her self-possession.

"The Marshal de Retz," he answered. "I journeyed there in the hope of obtaining information against him."

In a moment the Agnes of frivolous caprice became the Agnes of cold deliberation, — a statesman intent on a far-reaching purpose.

"The Bishop of Nantes, as you know, is my friend," she said. "By that you may guess that the marshal is my enemy. Tell me what you may have gathered against him."

"Allow me to delay obedience until I hear what you mean to communicate to me concerning the Pucelle," he answered.

She hesitated. "I know not how far I may trust you," she said. "I have for some time cherished the conviction that this Jeanne des Armoises may be a pretender, gaining credit by a deception which is an advantage to those who abet her. The Marshal de Retz has been her sole supporter among the nobles of the court. He is high in the king's favor, and I have not been able to undermine his influence. His wealth is boundless, and they say he deals

in the black art. To test the matter, Jeanne is to be summoned immediately to court" — Des Armoises started, — "and on the occasion of the ball at the castle, she is to be confronted with the king. If she is a pretender, there is one crucial test which she cannot endure. The king will ask her to tell him the secret that was between him and the Maid. Only two people in France know this secret; and, unless she is the true Jeanne, she can give no answer to the question."

Des Armoises was greatly agitated; but he endeavored to speak calmly as he said, "All things have their end; and the purpose of God may be guiding the event towards the exposure of an impostor. I have learned to believe that this is a necessary condition to the overthrow of the marshal."

"We are in accord, then," said Agnes, giving him her hand. "Let us swear fealty to a common purpose."

Des Armoises took the proffered hand, but quickly relinquished it, and stood with downcast head, struggling with himself. Duty had taken a double shape, and was beckoning him to contrary resolutions. At last he said, "If that test should fail, I will tell you of another which may serve the purpose. Tell the supposed Pucelle that her husband is dead; that you have met a friend of his who was with him in his

last moments. Cause her to believe this, and you will bring her to confession."

Agnes looked at him keenly as she said, "I will remember the suggestion. In return for my confidence, I will ask you to tell me what evidence you may have succeeded in gathering against the marshal. The Bishop of Nantes, who is his implacable enemy, would surely have aided you in this."

What Des Armoises replied did not transpire until the same evidence, in the mouths of others eager to overwhelm a fallen foe, secured damning judgment against the man, the public avowal of whose crimes awoke incredulous horror in the fiercest and most hardened spirits of that blood-stained age.

Meantime, the marshal, secure in a delusive prosperity that contained no hint of coming ruin, saw, in the summoning of the Pucelle to court, the crowning of his hopes. Once let her gain the confidence of the credulous king, and he believed that her influence could be extended until it should rival that of the vacillating monarch's most trusted advisers; perhaps deposing them to admit the reign of a new favorite, who should be guided by the counsels of the Marshal de Retz, thus allowing him to become what La Trémoille once had been, the power behind the throne, the true ruler of France.

CHAPTER XX.

DISCOVERY.



LAUDE had become an automaton moved by another's will; and life to her was a succession of fevered days and nights, through which she passed sustained only by an illusive hope, as the traveller in the desert is cheered by a mocking mirage. That she could ever regain her lost happiness became more and more impossible, even as a dream; and, at the suggestion of despair, a yawning gulf seemed to open at her feet. A tempter was ever at her side, ready, with plausible fallacies, to prove good evil and evil good, and to confuse expediency with justice. Resist his power as she might, his constant presence was in itself a baleful influence; for the atmosphere of personality with which each soul unconsciously invests itself, was, in the case of Gilles de Laval, tainted with the very breath of hell. Handsome, learned, rich, and powerful, he was able to deceive even himself with the convincing argument of success. He would have

Claude believe that happiness is to be found only in gratified ambition; the difference between high and low, rich and poor, consisting only in the varying degrees with which men have been endowed with ability to attain dominion over their fellows.

Love he defined as a passion in which one must give all, and in the end lose all, constancy being an empty dream, and the soul that remains master of itself being the only one able to escape the wreck of its illusions. He ridiculed Claude's fidelity to a past that had no more concern with the actual moment than the forgotten loves of the Pharaohs,—a past hour being as inevitably lost as a past century,—and he endeavored to impress upon her his belief in the all-sufficing character of the present. He declared that an evil angel had gifted man with hope and memory, the foes of joy; and that he who would truly realize contentment must be able to detach his heart from all outside of the passing hour. The intellect, that higher and more spiritual part of man, might busy itself with the concerns of the future; for it was as unimpressible as fire, and of the same ethereal quality. Ambition thus became the highest duty, and would lead the soul from sphere to sphere through all the celestial mansions of eternity.

According to his philosophy, Claude was happy in that she had risen from the obscure station of a peas-

ant girl, a servant, to that of the companion of princes. When the long-desired invitation came from the royal court, he became more daring in his speculations. He told his pupil that the fickle king was weary of the counsellors furnished him, and the mistress chosen for him by his mother-in-law, Queen Yolande. Boldness and resolution were all that was necessary to effect another revolution at court, and to depose the present favorites from their unstable positions. Let Charles of Valois and Jeanne of Orleans join hands in completing the salvation of the kingdom, and all France would prostrate herself before her rightful monarch, who would become the Charlemagne of his time.

Claude listened unprotesting: for, when with the marshal, she felt like the fascinated victim of a python's benumbing influence; and she realized, that, without a heaven-sent succor, she could not escape a complete and final surrender. The thought of her children's death was like the pang of a two-edged sword. In the night-time her ears were haunted by the bubbling cries which the cruel waters of the Moselle had stilled forever. The nurse with her charge had been swept overboard in an accident which had occurred to the boat in which the journey had been made to Toul; and, although the dead body of the woman had been recovered, the children's little forms could never rest in holy ground. Father Ambrose

assured her that their innocent souls were safe in the keeping of the angels of God; but Claude was sure that those strong and sinless guardians could never give such love as mothers learn in agonizing pain. The feeble little souls, strangers in paradise, needed her care. She must keep herself worthy that she might go to them.

This was the influence which fortified her with inward resistance, giving her the consciousness of a latent strength, which, if aroused, might make the the marshal's resolution quail before her own. The visit to Loches was to mark a crisis in her fate, but not with the result that De Retz triumphantly foretold. She believed that, once in the presence of the king, she should find courage to implore his protection, confess the imposture, and leave the result with the God who hates a lie and the maker of it.

In lonely hours of prayer and vigil she had reached this determination. It seemed to her that the true Jeanne, as an unseen influence, was urging her to it; the voices of her children and their angelic guardians enjoined it, as did also a less exalted motive — a deadly hatred of the marshal, to whom exposure would mean ruin.

The promptings of conscience, however, were opposed by those of a passionate love. Des Armoises had promised to receive her when she should have reached

the height of fame where the true Jeanne had stood. Was not the present that moment of success to which she had appealed? the hope of which had fortified her through hardship and peril, amid scenes of bloodshed at which her woman's nature revolted, in times of weakness and despair, when it had shone as the only star in the blackness of her night. Must she relinquish this hope at the moment of its fruition? Love prevailed, and kept her silent when the marshal talked of wealth and glory, a seat near the throne, and triumphs before which the memory of Orleans must pale.

The banquet hall at Loches was ablaze with countless candles, hung in glittering candelabra, and gay with costly decorations for the royal *fête*, the expenditures for which might have assisted in the payment of the arrears of which the soldiers in the army so bitterly complained. The dance went on no less merrily at Loches, that in the farther provinces of France tears and blood flowed, and hands were raised in vain appeal by the tortured and oppressed. He who takes wide views of life may always find subject for lament; and the courtiers, by limiting their sympathies, extended the play of those faculties which flourish best in the atmosphere of royal *salons*, wit and persiflage, and the humorous appreciation of those subtler shades of thought and fancy which go unnoticed by the common

herd. There were profound thinkers, subtle reasoners, and deep philosophers at the court of Charles the Well-served, restless minds with whom action translated itself into intrigue and subterfuge, who lived in secret distrust of their friends, and in smiling hatred of their enemies. Power was the god to whom these plotters sacrificed; and love, honor, decorum, modesty, were some of the votive gifts that decked his altar.

It was a busy world, sufficient unto itself; and Jeanne of Domrémy had not been welcome there when she came from her spindle and distaff to claim the sword and banner of a commander in the war. Her return was even more unwelcome, exciting a malevolent activity like that which greets the intrusion of a wasp into a hive of bees. Agnes Sorel was the only one who manifested no concern or distrust, but prepared with whole-souled generosity to welcome the Pucelle. She relinquished to her service her suite of apartments near those of the queen, and deputed her most trusted maids to attend her. She laid aside the regal splendor which she had of late assumed, in favor of the simple fashions which she had first brought to court in the train of the Duchess Isabel. It pleased her to remember that she was, in a sense, the daughter of Lorraine; and she greeted the Pucelle as a sister, and one with her in love of France.

De Retz smiled grimly when he saw the gentle

Agnes with her arm about Claude's waist, pacing with her up and down a garden alley.

"Is it that you feel an instinctive dread of a rival, my Lady of Beauté," he said under his breath, "and are taking means to ingratiate yourself with her before the storm breaks upon your lovely head?"

Bewildered by the confusion and glitter of the new world in which she found herself, Claude clung instinctively to the only friendly hand outstretched to her; and she responded warmly to the advances made by the lovely lady, whose beauty seemed second only to her goodness and kindness of heart. The king, with characteristic procrastination, put off the decisive meeting from day to day; and Agnes took advantage of the time afforded her to win the confidence of her whom she could not yet determine to be other than the true Jeanne Darc. Every question as to her past elicited frank and characteristic responses; each of her old companions at arms who was introduced to her presence she greeted by name without hesitation; and no one dared to express the bewildering doubt in which they were left as to the reality of that which their senses witnessed.

The Lady of Beauté did not realize that against her shrewd inquisition there was pitted the determination of a loving woman, conscious that the crucial moment of her fate had come; and the desperate resolve of

an ambitious man, who knew that for years powerful foes had been slowly but surely drawing a net about his feet. The marshal, assisted by his confessor, the Italian François, was alive to every movement of suspicion, and every scheme for discovery which the restless ingenuity of her enemies could devise. Smiles he knew were more dangerous than frowns; and he warned Claude to be especially on her guard against the blue-eyed lady whose charming simplicity had so greatly attracted her.

“Give her no confidence,” he said. “Eat nothing that comes to you from her hand. I have known poison to be conveyed in a sweetmeat taken from one lady’s plate to be placed upon that of a rival seated at her side. Believe nothing that your ears and eyes advise you of. Remember only my instructions, and look to me or to François in every moment of doubt. For the meeting with the king, I have already prepared you; fail not then, and you are forever secure.”

Claude thought of these words when she felt the arm of the Lady of Beauté about her waist; but she could not distrust the clear eyes and frank countenance of her whom she believed to be greatly injured by slanderous tongues, since after the confidences which Agnes had given her it was impossible to agree in the world’s uncharitable interpretation of her position at the court.

She professed an ardent devotion to her royal mistress, whose sweetness and generosity she much extolled; and for the king she had a reverent admiration, which, when first she came to court, she had expressed with a frankness that awakened comment of a sort she had not dreamed of.

“Bravery, tempered with prudence, unswerving devotion to a losing cause, cheerfulness in adversity; these things I recognized in him, and they seemed to me to be worthy of a king. Since then he has grown in statesmanship and the powers that make a leader of men. Shall I withdraw myself from the confidence reposed in me by both my royal patrons because evil-minded people judge all others by themselves?”

Before Claude was aware that she was incautiously disregarding the marshal's warning, she had opened her heart to her new friend, whose curious inquiries as to the mystery concerning her marriage and separation from her husband, she had not been able altogether to escape, since they were dictated, Agnes assured her, by a sincere desire that the Pucelle should take the place she deserved as the saviour of the kingdom. “The king delays to receive you,” Agnes declared, “because of the scandalous rumors that have come to us from Metz, and which he is unwilling to entertain in spite of the mystery that surrounds that portion of your history. Tell me as a friend how it was you

came to marry. Was it from love or from ambition?"

Thus questioned, Claude unburdened her heart as far as was possible without betraying her secret, finding relief in the opportunity thus given her to relate the thoughts and memories upon which her fancy fed.

"Tell me what sort of a man was this wondrously perfect Sire Des Armoises," said Agnes lightly. "Had he blue eyes or dark? was he hard favored or with a womanish beauty? I am curious to know; for when you tell me that he was the handsomest man in the world I say 'no' to that, for I have seen a man with a face like an angel."

Claude, with a look of sad abstraction, began a description of the face and form which still haunted her dreams; and Agnes listened with a suddenly awakened suspicion, which, upon reflection, grew to an obvious certainty. She felt a cruel satisfaction in a thought which lent to her blue eyes a steely glitter, and caused the sensuous curves of her mouth to harden into lines that betrayed an implacable resolve.

"I shall have revenge, my knight of the lily," she thought; "a full and complete revenge. — What you say serves to remind me," she remarked, "that I have once met the man whom you describe." Claude started with quick emotion. "I recall to mind that his name was the same. It had escaped my memory, for I met

him under circumstances which I was willing to forget." Claude pressed her hand upon her heart. "Tell me how you chanced to meet," she said.

"No; that I cannot do," replied Agnes, measuring her listener with a keen, unfriendly glance. "When last I heard from him he was desperately ill, and sent to urge from me a favor which I could not grant. How his illness resulted, whether he lived or died, I do not know."

"Not know but that he may be dead!" cried Claude. "Cruel, heartless woman, I must believe all that I have ever heard against you! You have been assuming a pretence of friendship to torture me thus at last."

"If it interests you, I can learn all that you may choose to hear from an intimate friend of his who is at present in Loches," said Agnes coldly, disregarding the injurious implication that brought the quick color to her face.

"I would give all that I have for any word from him," said Claude, her tone changing to one of humble entreaty, "and I would thank you on my knees."

"This evening, in the ballroom, I will send you word of what I may discover. The king will grant you an audience to-night." So saying, the Lady of Beauté turned and walked away with an air of indifference, leaving the pretender overwhelmed by distress and doubt. The strange change in the lady's manner and

the inconsistencies apparent in her words, awoke painful suspicions of the sincerity of her friendship; and the consciousness that the dreaded moment of the royal audience could no longer be postponed caused Claude's heart to sink with apprehension.

The reference to her husband had filled her with mingled hope and fear, — hope of a possible meeting, and fear that the lady's sinister hints might hide some painful truth. Her previous efforts to discover news of Des Armoises had been rewarded only in one instance, when Ambrose, journeying upon an aimless pilgrimage, with no other purpose than to fulfil her ardent wish, had come across Sire Des Armoises kneeling at night before a shrine in the cathedral of Reims. When addressed, he had risen in confusion and without reply, and hastening to mount his horse, had disappeared in the darkness. This circumstance made it evident that his persistent silence was no argument against his well-being, while it showed only too plainly the hopeless alienation of his affection.

A *fête champêtre* had been arranged for the evening; and the beautiful gardens, to whose adornment the king had devoted his attention while the fate of his kingdom was hanging in the balance, were full of a brilliant throng, among whom the Pucelle entered trembling, conducted by a lord of the bedchamber.

A vast arbor, hung with glittering candelabra which

showed like magnified fire-flies through the green, served as audience chamber to the king; and here a gilded throne was placed beneath a trellis of roses, and seats of lesser dignity were occupied by the queen and her mother, surrounded by the most distinguished nobles of the court. Charles d'Anjou, dressed to represent his royal brother-in-law, sat upon the throne; and as Claude approached, he rose, and advanced a step to meet her.

"His Highness is ready to receive you," said the chamberlain. "Kneel and kiss his hand."

"This is not the king," responded Claude. "I beg you will lead me to him."

These words produced a visible sensation in the throng.

"'Tis Jeanne herself," said one, in a voice expressive of anything but satisfaction. "Just so it was contrived at Chinon that she should be deluded by a false representation of the king, which did not for a moment deceive her."

"Notice whether she will as readily detect his Royal Highness," replied another. "He sits yonder in the shadow with his lame foot on a cushion, and he is talking to one of the queen's ladies in waiting."

"If it were with the queen herself, the disguise would have been complete," said a flippant wit in a whisper.

Led by the chamberlain, Claude moved slowly forward, followed by an eager and curious crowd, among whom, as Agnes Sorel observed, the foremost was the Marshal de Retz, between whom and his *protégée* she more than once had detected the exchange of a quick glance of intelligence.

Charles turned to find the pretender on her knees at his feet. She had fallen there, speechless with horror, as a piece of paper had been thrust into her hand, upon which at a glance she read these words:—

“Your husband died of the illness of which I told you. I have the news from the friend who closed his eyes.”

As if through surging waves that overwhelmed her, she heard the voice of the king, who extended his hand to raise her, exclaiming in a tone which betrayed the credulous surprise he felt at the detection of his disguise, “Welcome, Pucelle, my good friend, in the name of God who alone knows the secret that is between you and me.”

“God pardon me, and grant that your Highness may have mercy upon me!” she cried, bursting into tears. “I am not the Maid of Orleans, but an unhappy wife who has driven her husband to his death, an impostor, whom heaven and earth cry out against. Forgive me, forgive me; for I am a lost and stricken soul.”

In an instant the place was in an uproar. Some

cried treason, and drew their swords about the king to defend him from they knew not what attempt of his enemies; vengeance was urged upon the trembling woman, who grovelled in the agony of her grief and shame; and threats were made against those who had contrived the intrigue, De Retz's name in some mysterious way finding utterance upon the lips of those who repeated it, not knowing from whom the suggestion first had come.

As if to confirm suspicion, the marshal immediately left the castle, retiring to Nantes, where he was shortly afterwards arrested by the order of the Duke of Brittany, who had long been seeking an opportunity to humiliate the Lavals, who occupied a threatening line of fortresses on the borders of Maine, Brittany, and Poitou, and formed a powerful opposition to the duke, succeeding at last, in spite of the fall of De Retz, in delivering the duchy to the king.

The marshal, secure in the prestige of his name, made no attempt to escape his enemies, and with arrogant unconcern confronted the tribunal formed to try his cause, consisting of the Bishop of Nantes, Chancellor of Brittany, the Vicar of the Inquisition, and the grand judge of the duchy. The developments of his trial caused horror throughout the country. The charges of murder and sorcery were amazingly verified. He was condemned to the stake; but, in

concession to his position and powerful connections, his sentence was mitigated in that he was strangled before reaching the place of execution. Before the body was consumed, it was given up, at the demand of his relatives, to a company of nuns led by the Abbess Hilda, who, with their own hands, gave it honorable burial in the church of the Carmelites, which the marshal's gifts had founded.

Meantime the fate of the false Jeanne hung in the balance. A council was held, consisting of the king's most intimate advisers, many of whom, suspecting a widespread conspiracy, were eager to visit upon the pretender the severest penalties of the law. Some urged the gibbet and the stake; others a slow starvation or perpetual imprisonment; but the king, fortified by the advice of his secret and most trusted counsellor, declared himself in favor of more lenient measures.

"Leave her punishment to me, my lord," Agnes Sorel had said. "Is it not evident that this imposture succeeded simply because the people of France yearned to believe, even against all probability, that which they most desired? Jeanne Darc is, and must ever be, the idol of her countrymen; she is France incarnate, the unconquerable spirit of an unselfish patriotism that is deathless because divine. Let us not oppose ourselves to this superstitious veneration for her name. Destroy the false Jeanne, and she becomes a martyr; shut her

in prison, and endless conspiracies will be undertaken for her release, for it will be impossible to convince the people of their error. The widest publicity must be given to the exposure of the pretender. Let shame be her only punishment; it will be a sufficient one."

Claude herself was indifferent to her fate, and careless of the gratitude which she was told she owed to the Lady of Beauté for her intercession in her favor. Agnes, indeed, was actuated only by motives of policy, and had so little compassion for her whom she suspected to be her unconscious rival that she had devised one added pang for her to suffer before she went forth to meet the world's execration.

Roger D'Arblay, the mysterious knight of the lily, had been summoned to Nantes to appear as one of the witnesses against the marshal. Before he set out he had been bidden to a farewell interview with Madame Agnes in her boudoir, to reach which the page who conducted him contrived that he should make the tour of the apartments which, with sarcastic generosity, Agnes still allowed to the occupancy of the false Jeanne, and where, in the midst of splendor, she was now a dreary prisoner.

The room where she sat was full of chattering ladies, who made it their practice to spend their mornings there in the pretense of executing a large tapestry which Agnes had devised to celebrate the exploits of

the Maid of Orleans, but in reality to satisfy both their curiosity and their malice to the full extent of their opportunity. Claude could not escape the sound of their unfriendly voices, the sword thrusts of their premeditated witticisms and impertinent questionings. Agnes, who sometimes entered to superintend their needlework, would curl her lips in a smile of scornful amusement, which was encouragement enough for the license of her ladies' tongues.

On the morning in question every seat was occupied, and the work went on with feverish energy, while eyes and ears were strained and alert, until, at the opening of the farther door, conversation was suddenly suspended.

"This way, my lord," said the page, who wore the liveries of Madame Agnes, "my lady is expecting you."

The pretender sat near a window in an attitude of listless dejection, which changed, as she turned to observe the young man thus addressed, into excited amazement. She rose and stood with one trembling hand upon the arm of her chair, while she extended the other as if to invoke a phantom, her eyes dilated, her lips trembling. As the young man approached she took a step forward. "Robert!" she exclaimed under her breath. He looked up and their eyes met. He hesitated, colored violently, made a motion as if he

were about to speak, and then went on his way in silence.

As Claude sank half-fainting into her seat, a shrill burst of laughter came from a lady who bent towards her and whispered in her ear, "It is in vain that you try to win his notice. He has long been the dear friend of my lady Agnes. Could you hope to be her rival, even if he were your husband?"

"My husband! How can you know that?" exclaimed Claude, with blanching lips.

"He told my lady the truth concerning you before it came to light in any other way," was the reply; "and he begged her to deceive you by the rumor of his death, saying that he would not for the world meet an exposed impostor, who might claim to be his wife."

That day sentence was pronounced against the false Jeanne; and, though she begged for death and rejected mercy, it consisted only in this, that she should be taken to the capital of the kingdom, and there showed in a public place to all the people, while she should make confession of her condition and estate, and of the foul imposture which she had devised under pretense of being the Pucelle, whereby many had been deceived; the same accusation and confession being made in every city where she should sojourn on the route to Paris.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE REVIEW OF THE BASOCHE.



NE summer morning Paris awoke to the pleasing consciousness of an impending festivity, the expectation of which caused the desolation of the past to be forgotten. Only two years previously wolves had entered the plague-stricken city, and had devoured the dead and dying in the streets; now the light-hearted gayety of the Parisians asserted itself, and, on a day given up to a diversion so dear to them, a public festival, decreed that none should mourn. The clerks of the Basoche were once more to delight the eyes of their countrymen by their grand annual parade, which was of late fallen into desuetude, in consequence of the unfortunate state of public affairs, but now to be revived with more than customary splendor, and to be followed, as in former days, by the popular farce which it had been their habit to perform quarterly, in ridicule of king, priest, and noble, and all the established institutions of the state.

The license of speech tolerated on these occasions,

rather than the merit of the performance, won the applause of the populace, whose slumbering grudge against the oppressions of the great thus found voice, and the Basochiens ruled four days in the year by the suffrages of the people.

For a week the members of the order had been assembling at the national capital from all parts of the country, each band being under the command of its lieutenant, and distinguished by a particular badge, significant of the province or city to which it belonged. The rallying place for the day was the square before the Palace of Justice, where, reviving a former custom, they had that year planted the May; and towards this point the troops directed their course at early dawn.

The indolent bourgeois who did not rise with the sun had his sleep disturbed by the loud *fanfares* of trumpets discordantly sounded, and accompanied by the beat of drums and the shrill sound of fifes and hautboys. Every musical company in the city, being temporarily under the orders of the Kingdom of the Basoche, was displaying an earnest endeavor to win distinction by outdoing the sound of every other. The result caused him who heard it to fling his cap into the air, or in some equally lively way to display his satisfaction, while exclaiming, "La Basoche! It is the day of the review."

The companies defiled in military order through the streets, mounted upon horses whose housings showed the color of their riders' garments, blue or yellow, or a parti-colored mixture of the two. The leader of each company bore a standard, to which was attached a piece of vellum painted with the design which the members of his command wore on the shoulder. With some it was a *cœur-de-lis*, emblem of Orleans; with others from the same region of the Loire, a prickly porcupine. One loyal troop bore the golden sun, the device of Charles of Valois. The assistants of the commander-in-chief were known by the ivy wreath, the especial device of the order.

The forming of the procession was assisted by these special marks, which enabled each member to report to his own lieutenant; who, in turn, placed himself under the command of one or another of the twelve captains, who divided the forces into as many brigades; and these being reinforced by accessions from the clerks of the Parliament and Châtelet as they proceeded, became a formidable host before they reached the meeting-place.

The king of the Basoche sat upon a throne on a platform erected in the centre of the palace yard. He wore a blue velvet mantle, sewn with golden *fleurs-de-lis*, over a robe of yellow satin brocaded with blue ivy leaves. The rich tapestry which covered the plat-

form was worked to display the arms of the order. The king held the sceptre of office in his hand; and, as each company defiled before him, he lowered it with a gesture of regal condescension to acknowledge the salute of the captain. Mounted heralds were busy on all sides in repressing the efforts of the populace to gain possession of coveted positions within the courtyard for the observation of the show. The clamor of the multitude, and the successive strains of twelve musical companies as they circled through the square, produced a deafening hubbub.

When all his subjects had passed in review before him, the king laid aside his mantle, mounted a mettlesome charger that stood waiting, and, seizing a cornet, led the way in a wild chase through the city, followed by his twelve companies, each member of which was blowing a horn or beating a drum. In the order of their rank they visited the houses of the first and second presidents of the Chamber, the attorney-general, the chancellor, the deputies and councillors, and officers of the king. Each, in turn, was greeted with an alarum from eight hundred instruments, and a shout from as many throats; after which the Basochiens came back in a mad race to the palace.

It was *saue qui peut* with the crowd in the streets, when, now here, now there, a drum or a trumpet announced a flying squad of horsemen, whose aim it

was to reach, before all others, the goal marked by the oak-tree planted the first of May, in honor of the Basoche, at the foot of the great staircase of the palace. Here all dismounted, hung their badges on the tree, and disbanded to prepare for the performance of the farce.

In the crowded condition of the thoroughfares, a new procession, making its way in the direction of the University, found it difficult to proceed, though the armed soldiers who rode in it demanded place in the name of the king.

"There is no king to-day in Paris but the King of the Basoche," said an impertinent horseman, who, under the impulse of the surging multitude, found himself involuntarily disputing the passage of the Rue de la Vielle Draperie. "Which reminds me," he added boldly, "that it becomes my duty to arrest you in the name of his Highness as treasonable intruders without a permit in precincts sacred to his authority."

The soldiers swore roundly, but, knowing the license long accorded to the organization of the Basoche, their leader at last consented to display to the self-constituted guardian of the law the orders under which he brought a prisoner from Loches to Paris. This prisoner had become to so great an extent the object of the curious scrutiny of the populace, that the

festival of the day and the promised farce bade fair to be forgotten.

The object of this interest was a young and handsome woman, dressed in a travelling costume of sombre hue, but strangely distinguished by two pasteboard escutcheons hung across her bosom and upon her back, the one bearing in red letters the word *Liar*, the other, *Impostor*.

The Basochien, after reading the warrant signed and sealed in the name of the king, judged it discreet to allow the sergeant to proceed upon his way, with a message to the attorney-general that the prisoner whom he was expecting had been brought to Paris to suffer the judgment decreed by the king to be done under the direction of the officers of the Parliament and University; but the clerk of the Basoche inserted the request that the penalty should be inflicted with the concurrence of the Kingdom of the Basoche, who were that day supreme, and that the scene of it should be the palace courtyard, near the decorated tree which was their rendezvous.

“By St. Denis, it is ill done of our masters to attempt to divert attention from our performance by a rival spectacle,” said the king, after warmly commending the zeal and discretion of his captain. “They have long had a grudge against us, though they do not dare openly to avow it. They threaten to sup-

press our farces, and resort to underhand devices to weaken our influence. Give it to them, my good subjects, in your farce to-day. Let none be too high to escape your ridicule."

After a period of delay, an officer arrived with the message that no objection was made to the demand of the Basoche, since the courtyard of the Palace of Justice would serve as well as any other place for the public exposition of the malefactor whose sentence he proceeded to put into execution. It required that she should stand in view of the populace until the evening, at which time she would be released, and suffered to go her way without further molestation. The prisoner was accordingly made to dismount, her hood and riding-coat were removed, leaving her in the plaited petticoat, bodice, and kerchief of a peasant of Lorraine; and she was stationed, by the further interference of the clerk of the Basoche, upon the platform which had borne the royal throne, at the foot of the broad staircase near which the oak-tree of the Basoche flaunted its gay decorations.

The clerk of the deputy provost, taking his stand near by, cried in a sonorous voice, "People and citizens, the honorable officers of the Parliament, acting under the king's orders, have caused to be brought hither the rank impostor and liar who for the last four years

has vexed the kingdom with the false claim that she was the Maid of Orleans escaped from death at Rouen. She is now shown openly to all the people, it being ordered that she shall stand in this place till six^o of the clock; while, at the striking of every hour, her crimes and misdemeanors shall be rehearsed against her, so that the pernicious falsehood which she has maintained shall be exposed and denied, to the confusion of evil-doers, and the encouragement of righteousness. Hear ye now the confession of the woman Claude taken from her own mouth, wherein she declares that she has abused the belief of the people by claiming to be Jeanne the Maid."

With this preamble he read the confession, couched in terms of abject humility, from time to time turning towards the prisoner and demanding, "Are these your words?"

"They are my words," she answered, baring her soul to ignominy as she would gladly have bared her bosom to the sword.

The officers of the Basoche, co-operating with those of the law, kept the crowd at a distance sufficient to prevent their thronging the space already guarded by a twisted rope of blue and yellow ribbon, which encircled the tree, and the platform from which the throne had now been removed, and which became a pillory exposed to the gaze of the hundreds who had

assembled to observe the Review. Claude could hear their derisive comments and ribald jests, and witness their eager enjoyment of the spectacle of human degradation and suffering, which caused a keener and more gleeful sensation than the view of the parade or the promised witticisms of the farce. A loud-voiced herald, in a blue and yellow tabard, announced that the hour for the performance at the Châtelet had now arrived, beseeching the attendance of the spectators, and promising that they might return later by way of the palace where a rendezvous of the Basoche would be called again at the close of the day; a pillory being not so unique a spectacle but that it might be seen any day in seven at the street corners, while the farce of the Basoche came only four times a year. By these persuasions he succeeded in partially emptying the courtyard of the thieves, gamins, beggars, and women of the town, as well as the reputable citizens with their wives and daughters who were abroad for their holiday, and who proceeded on their way, only to give place to others who took the same route for their pleasuring.

The sun climbed high, and its vertical rays fell upon the bare head of the prisoner in the courtyard. As the hour of noon was sounded by the chimes of Notre Dame and the deep-toned bell of the Palace of Justice, and taken up by other metallic voices that

fell and floated like distant echoes, the officer read again the prisoner's confession, and asked,—

“Are these your words?”

“They are my words,” she responded.

Distinguished personages in rich attire, who went up and down the broad staircase, stopped to talk in serious groups as they stared at the culprit, expressing their wonder that any could have been deceived by so patent a deception, that the king should have so long delayed to punish it, and that the punishment should be so light.

“Orleans, not Paris, should be the scene of the pretender's punishment; and the gibbet or the stake should be the means of it,” said a member of the University. “It brings the law into contempt when arch-traitors are treated more leniently than any petty thief. I have seen the time when the University would not yield its privileges of adjudication on account of a bit of parchment signed by the king's hand. We allow the pernicious impostor to enter and leave the city on the same day, when a twelve-month in a dungeon would be none too long a preparation for a trial, properly conducted by a legally constituted court. Moreover, by allowing the seditious organization of the Basoche to co-operate in the execution of this informal sentence, we lay ourselves open to ridicule as well as to contempt.”

“I am, on the whole, of your opinion, and consider this royal monopoly of justice a blow aimed at our privileges,” replied a colleague; “but consider that the people of the provinces, especially those of Orleans, are madly devoted to the name of the Pucelle. They have lately expended large sums of money in honor of this impostor, and rather than acknowledge themselves to be deluded fools they would be likely to go to any length to maintain the delusion.”

With surly looks of offended dignity the men of the law went on their way.

The sun beat still more fiercely upon the weary prisoner in the square, to whom the increasing physical misery of her strained and aching muscles brought the benumbing of mental pain. The unfriendly comment of the crowd no longer caused her nerves to tingle with the keen pangs of shame; it seemed to concern another than herself, whose punishment she bore vicariously, while in her inmost being she was far away from the scene of her ignominy. She fancied that she sat with her sister Jeanne upon the grass by the Fairy Fountain. There it was always cool, for a breeze swayed the pendent branches of the beech, when every other tree in the forest hung limp in the August noon. She could hear the musical gurgle of the water as it left the basin for its run over the stones. Fragments of leaves thrown into the channel swirled

about like boats at shipwreck, following the tempestuous eddies. "Do not tear the leaves, sister; give them to me for my garland,"—it was Jeanne's voice in its sweet, childish shrillness like the tone of a silver bell. Tears sprang to the pretender's eyes. "Forgive me, dear Jeanne," she murmured; and at the sound of her own words the spell was broken. The narrow streets of Paris, crowded and noisome even to the palaces of king and nobles, sent forth steaming exhalations in the fierce heat. A whining beggar was making the round of the courtyard, beseeching aid from all whom he met. "I do not ask from you, liar and impostor," he said, looking up with a leer as he passed.

The clerk repeated his reading as the clock of the Palace of Justice gave the stroke of one. "She confesses that she is no maid, but the widow of a knight to whom she bore two sons."

Claude flung her arms into the air, while the people laughed about her. She did not heed them; she felt her children's heads upon her breast; their eyes looked into hers vague with the mystery of life unconscious of itself, but penetrated and infused with love, the beginning and the end of all its joy and pain. Then she remembered the long street in Marville, with its quaint red houses, and the projecting gold-hung doorway of Jean Gugnot's house, where the Sire Des

Armoises had taken her hand, and smiled into her eyes with admiring reverence. "A widow, yes, for he is dead to me, as I to him," she thought, blinded with tears of shame and grief.

A man descended the stairway as the clock struck three. He had been detained in the Salle Mercière to answer the inquiries of some learned jurists, who were eager to learn the particulars of the notorious trial of the Marshal de Retz, with which all France was ringing. It was with difficulty that he escaped from their inquisition by pretending ignorance of all that had occurred; though his passports and credentials, dated at Nantes, argued that he should be as well informed as those whose despatches he carried in the service of the bishop of that city.

Finding him unresponsive to their questionings and indifferent to their advances, the gentlemen to whom he had been introduced after a time gave over the attempt to show him the civilities which he rejected on the plea that he had weighty business on hand.

"Do not fail to leave the palace by way of the marble staircase where the false Jeanne is exposed," said one. "You will find some entertainment in the sight; and there is a farce at the Châtelet, though that is no doubt well-nigh at an end by this time. The farces of the Basoche are at the most nothing but seditious tirades against constituted authorities,

with little wit to relieve their impertinence. Would I could have heard the marshal's confession! Four hundred calcined skeletons, they say, were found in the vaults of his castle at Suze. A bloodthirsty monster, and a disgrace to the nobility of France."

The visitor to Paris, who had been commended by the bishop as "Our good friend, Sire Roger D'Arblay," paused when he had reached the foot of the staircase, and seated himself, as if overcome by sudden weariness, upon its lowest step. The platform which served as a pillory to the pretender was directly in front of him, facing the entrance of the Rue de la Vielle Draperie. The victim's back was turned towards him, and he could watch her without being himself observed. As he took his place upon the step, the clerk, who was lounging near, straightened himself with a yawn and began: "Hear ye, hear ye, the confession of the lying impostor Claude, who has called herself the Maid of Orleans."

The people in adjacent streets and byways ran together at the sound.

"They are preaching her again. Come and see the lying wench. — She is as white as death, and looks as if she were ready to fall from the platform. — She should feel the lash upon her back. — My son Simon was well-nigh flogged to death for offending one of the provost's men by the mere chance of being under

his horse's heels, and oversetting him in the gutter. Such is justice in this world. — They say she has been mistress to a priest high in favor at court, and able to buy her safety. — When she is let go, what hinders us from tearing the clothes from her back, and giving her some of the blows she so richly deserves?"

The man upon the staircase buried his face in his hands, while a crimson flush rose to the roots of his hair. It was as if he were on a pillory before all Paris, before the world, and that an unimagined infamy had fallen upon him.

"It is my fate henceforth," he thought. "Why should I try to escape it longer?"

He left his seat, and paced restlessly back and forth, casting scrutinizing glances at the pallid victim of the popular ill-will, whose clouded eyes, fixed on vacancy, took no notice of those who came and went about her, and gave no heed to the words that made him wince with pain.

He stood beside the platform, still draped with the blue and gold tapestries upon which appeared the arms of the Basoche.

"This is part of the show of the day," said a student passing near him. "The Basochiens are preparing to adopt a queen. Who could be more worthy a consort for his royal Highness than she who has been so distinguished as to pass for four years as

Jeanne Darc? At six of the clock, a rendezvous will be called here to offer the fair impostor a royal crown. She is no greater a deceiver than many who have worn the diadem. Why should all Paris stand agape as if the distinction of being a liar were wholly unique in our most Christian city? She is a fair wench, with a winsome eye, and needs only a more cheerful occasion to prove herself a merry one. Would I were king of the Basoche."

Robert's fingers closed convulsively over the hilt of his sword. "Degraded, lost; why should I interfere to save her?" he queried; but he said this in grim criticism of the resolve that had brought him there, and not with any vacillating purpose.

Another hour dragged by. Robert noticed that the knees of the pretender trembled with weakness and fatigue. Her face was deadly pale, and dark circles showed about her eyes. A softer emotion moved him.

"What am I that I should hold myself above her?" he thought. "Am I better, purer, less an apostate to my highest self? In the mind of the Creator there exists a definite ideal of each one of the creatures of his hands. On the sixth day, testing his work, he found that all was good; but man has marred the plan, and of the image of God in which he was designed he shows only a blurred and dis-

torted reflection in the darkened mirror of his soul. We are no nearer our true selves than the unmasked pretender is to the Maid of Orleans."

At this name he bowed his head, and pressed his lips to a silver medal that hung by a chain about his neck. "Farewell, Jeanne, type of an angelic purity," he said in thought. "You have saved me from degradation and despair. You have been at my side in moments of weakness, and near me in times of spiritual exaltation, when kneeling by night beside some holy shrine I have fancied myself gifted like Galahad with the power to receive angelic visitations. I must renounce my fealty to you, and descend from the serene elevation where you dwell, to take my place once more in the mire and blood of this earthly life, where all are sinners, struggling and oppressed, stretching out polluted hands to the far-away saints, to the Mother of Sorrows, to the crucified Christ, for succor, that Heaven sends most often only through the gift of some brother sinner. Can this be the lesson of our life? Who knows?"

The chimes struck the hour of five, and the choir in the Holy Chapel began the vesper service. The chants sounded sweetly over the confusion and hubbub of the streets; and Claude, listening, was moved to tears. Through the chanting voices she seemed

to hear the words which Father Ambrose had addressed to her, when with convulsive sobs she had said farewell to him at Loches.

“Fear nothing, my daughter, that man can do to you. At the time of your penance I will be with you, though unseen. The church is more powerful than king or state. She welcomes the broken-hearted penitent with open arms. I will lead you to her embrace. When the hopes of earth fade upon you, the convent opens to receive you.”

Secure in the friar's promise, she looked forward without dread to the hour of her release, which would be also the hour when the protection of the law would be withdrawn from her; and the threatening mob, hitherto kept at a respectful distance, would be free to work its threats upon her who had all day suffered its execration.

Six o'clock, sounded from the many belfries of the Cité, was the signal for the weary sentinel to turn with an insulting phrase to his prisoner while assisting her trembling steps to descend upon the pavement, where a crowd immediately closed about her. “Room for the Basoche!” cried a dozen voices. Drums and horns gave emphasis to the command, while the mounted captains cleared the square by successive charges upon the rabble. Shouts, oaths, screams, and laughter filled the air; while the king, dismounting,

flung the bridle of his horse to a squire, and hastily advancing, placed an arm about Claude's shrinking form.

"Fair damsel, I claim you as my bride," he said, "and offer you the half of my kingdom, which is the whole of France."

"Give place, impious youth," cried the voice of a priest at his side. "This penitent is the bride of the church. The convent of the Carmelite nuns is to receive her to-day as an inmate."

Des Armoises, who had instinctively drawn his sword, at these words returned it to the scabbard, but not before Claude's kindling eyes had caught sight of his figure in its attitude of armed defense.

"Robert!" she cried, holding out entreating arms, whose appeal he did not resist. He took her hand, and drew her towards him.

"This is my wife," he said, looking about him unflinchingly. "She may choose between me and the convent."

The clerks of the Basoche began a running fire of jesting comment, which fell upon all impartially, like the brilliant but evanescent sparks of sputtering fireworks, and with most effect upon their dejected monarch, who retreated in confusion, mounted his horse, and gave the order for the dispersal of his subjects

for another four months' interval of serious labors in the offices of the jurists and counsellors of France.

The Review of the Basoche was over.

Claude held her husband's hand, and looked into his face. She did not hear the impassioned appeals which Ambrose poured into her ears; she did not see the gesture of despair with which he turned and departed in confusion and bitterness of spirit. This was the moment when the lightning stroke of a consuming jealousy revealed to him the gulf beneath his feet. He fled; expatriated himself; and died not long after in Siena.

"Come," said Robert solemnly, with the full consciousness of the burden to which he had willingly bowed his shoulders, but with a certain gladness in the renunciation which consecrated it with the possibilities of hope.

Claude obeyed, as she would have obeyed if he had beckoned her to instant death. Reverence, awe, a passionate tenderness, a gratitude too deep for words, filled her heart as she walked beside him, feeling the warm contact of his hand to be a living pledge of forgiveness and of blessing.

Thus with the chastened minds of those who turn

their backs upon that Paradise whose doors are forever guarded by the flaming sword, to seek a beckoning hope that lies beyond the stubborn thistle-bearing fields of earth, they went forth, hand in hand, through the deepening shadows.

CHAPTER XXII.

REHABILITATION.



LETTER from Jean de Metz, knight,¹ to his sister, Frau Eudeline Van Houten, at the Hague.

Written in Rouen, the seventh day of July, 1456.

“To my very dear sister :—

If you could leave the circle of your fireside and the beloved company of your husband and children to look in upon your lonely brother to-night, you would see in him a man whose one earthly ambition is satisfied, or as nearly so as ever falls out in this world of disappointment. The trial for the rehabilitation of Jeanne Darc, which opened the first of June in Rouen, has resulted in a decree pronounced this seventh day of July, whereby the sentence of the first trial is declared null and void, calumnious and iniquitous and of no effect.

Thus is our holy martyr relieved of the stain so long affixed to her glorious name. Has this been effected out of a just zeal for the service of God and the cause of truth? Alas, that I must answer No. Policy has dictated the royal course, and policy has shaped the actions of the Papal Court; though to you, who choose to call yourself a Protestant, I must say as little as possible on that score.

¹ Jean de Metz was knighted in the year 1440.

Suffice it to note that the testimony of the hundreds of witnesses who rejoiced to raise their voices in her favor has been garbled and distorted, and made to reveal the truth only in part. Many notable personages whose names have been cited as witnesses have not been asked to give their depositions ; while those of others are so disposed as to omit any facts which might prove unwelcome to the judges. The events of the close of 1429 and those of 1430 are passed over in silence.

The book of Poitiers was not produced, nor would it have been, even if it were not, as is probably the case, long since destroyed by those envious of Jeanne's fame. This is the register in which were preserved all the promises which Jeanne made before undertaking her mission; some of which have been fulfilled, while some failed of fulfilment through the fault of the king and his advisers.

In future years, those who have not known Jeanne will be grossly deceived as to the scope and purpose of her mission, if they rely upon the evidence of this trial.

I rejoice that justice has been done, in part at least, to her memory ; and I look forward with certain hope to a day, which I shall not live to see, when the church shall number among her most glorious saints the immortal Maid of Orleans."

APPENDIX.

A RÉSUMÉ OF THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE CONCERNING THE FALSE JEANNE D'ARC.

HISTORY in certain phases presents a series of almost insoluble problems, in whose consideration the imagination must be allowed equal authority with the critical faculties of the mind, whose action is limited by the absence of proper logical sequence in the facts recorded.

Who was the false Jeanne d'Arc? She is a personage concerning whose history we have to a certain extent definite and precise information, but in regard to whose actual being and character we are left very much in the dark.

Herewith is given a *résumé* of the main points in the case, to connect which with any semblance of coherence, a fanciful theory must be accepted, based on a chosen hypothesis; for in this instance, as in many others, time has destroyed the edifice, and left us only a view of the scaffolding that served for its construction; or, to use another simile, has given us a few fossil bones from which the skeleton of the extinct animal must be reconstructed, clothed with flesh, and endowed with the breath of a long-departed life, in an environment foreign to our

experience. What wonder if the result should be only a scientific paradox? The savant has faith in his pterodactyls, and the historian too often blindly accepts the prejudiced conclusions of those who have preceded him.

In the year 1436, five years after the death of Jeanne d'Arc at Rouen, a rumor spread through Lorraine and Champagne, and further among the cities of the Loire, that the Maid was still alive; another had been burned in her stead at Rouen; she had appeared in Metz, and had been recognized by her brothers.

Two different manuscripts preserve for us the record of these circumstances, made by the Dean of St. Thibaud in his Chronicle of Metz, the first of which may be thus literally translated:—

“In the year 1436 Sire Phelepin Marcoulz was sheriff of Metz. This year, the 20th day of May, came the Maid Jeanne who had been in France, to Grange-aux-Hormes, near to St. Privay, and there was brought to talk to some of the lords of Metz; and she called herself Claude. And the same day there saw her there her two brothers, one of whom was a knight and called Pierre, and the other Petit-Jean, a squire; and they thought she had been burned, and as soon as they saw her they knew her, and she did them. And Monday the 21st day of said month, they took their sister with them to Bacquilon; and there the Sire Nicole Lowe, knight, gave her a horse worth thirty francs and a pair of leggings; and lord Aubert Boulay, a cap, and Sire Nicole Groignat, a sword. And the said Maid rode her horse very skilfully, and said several things to Sire Nicole Lowe by which he understood that it was she who had been in France; and she was recognized by many signs as the Pucelle Jeanne of France, who brought the King Charles to be crowned at Reims. And many would say that she had been burned at Rouen, and she spoke the most of her words by parables, and told

nothing of her intention, and said that she had no power before John the Baptist's Day.

"But when her brothers had met her, she returned at the feast of Pentecost into the city of Mareville, at the house of Jehan Quenast, and was there about three weeks ; and then set out to go to our Lady of Liance on the third. And when she wished to go away, many from Metz went to see her at the said Mareville, and there they recognized that it was really Jeanne the Maid of France. And then Jeoffroy Dex gave her a horse. And then she went to Arelont, a city that is in the duchy of Luxembourg.

"Item : When she was at Arelont she was always at the side of Madame de Luxembourg. (Note by the editor of the manuscript : Not the one mentioned in the first trial, but the effective and hereditary mistress of the duchy, Elizabeth de Goerlitz, niece by alliance of the Duke of Burgundy.)

"And there was a great throng, until the Count of Warnonbourg took her to Cologne. And the said count loved her much, and when she wished to go, he had made for her a beautiful cuirass to arm her. And then she came to the said Arelon, and there was made the marriage of Messire Robert des Hermoises, knight, and the said Jehanne the Pucelle. And then afterwards came the said Siour des Hermoises to live in Metz, in the house of the said Sire Robert, which was before Sainte-Segoleine ; and there they stayed while it pleased them."

The tone of the second copy of the manuscript is noticeably different, it being evidently written at a later date, after the exposure of the imposture. The spelling is, of course, unique, as in the matter of proper names each scribe of that period was a law unto himself.

"Messire Philip Marcouls, in the year 1436. In this year came a young girl who said she was the Maid of France, and played the part so well that many were deceived, and especially those of high rank. And she was at La Grange à l'Horme. And there were the

lords of Metz, such as the lord Nicole Lowe, who gave her a horse of the price of thirty francs, and the lord Albert Boullay a cap, and the lord Nicole Grognot a sword. And she was dressed like a man, and two of her brothers accompanied her ; and soon after the feast of Pentecost she returned into the city of Mairville, and was there about three weeks at the house of a goodman called Jean Cugnot ; and several people of Metz went there, and gave her many jewels, and the Lord Jeoffroy Dex gave her a horse. And she departed and went to our Lady of Liance, and afterwards to Arlon, and was always with Madame de Luxembourg ; and there she was married to the Lord Robert des Armoises, and came to live in Metz on the hill of the Muzele gate."

Still later this same account is given in another form by Philip Vigneule, a historian of Metz in the sixteenth century. As is natural, he characterizes the affair even more decidedly as an imposture.

"In the same year, 1436, came a novelty of one who tried to counterfeit another ; for at this time, May 22, a girl named Claude, being in woman's clothes, was shown as being Jeanne the Maid," etc., and he concludes, " But since, the truth has been known."

Who was this pretender that so closely resembled Jeanne d'Arc as to deceive her brothers ? What was the charm by which she gained the admiration of the nobles of Metz, the intimate friendship of the Duchess of Luxembourg, the love of Count Ulric of Würtemberg, and the hand of a wealthy nobleman of ancient lineage ?

Why did she linger three weeks at Marville at the beginning of her career ? This name recurs, curiously enough, in a document important in this connection, the contract of sale of one-fourth the estate of Haraucourt,

by Robert Des Armoises and Jeanne du Lis, called the Pucelle, his wife, which can be thus literally rendered : —

“We, Robert des Harmoises, knight, lord of Thichiemont, and Jeanne du Lys, the Pucelle of France, lady of the said Thichiemont, my wife, licensed and authorized by me, Robert above named, to agree and accord in all that follows, make known to all to whom these presents may come, that we conjointly together and with a common consent, and each of us by himself and for both, have sold, ceded, and transported to the honorable person Collard de Faily, squire, living at Marville, and to Poinsette, his wife, the fourth part that we have and may have . . . in all the town, limits, and confines of Haraucourt, etc.

“Witnessed by our great and good friend, Jean de Thoneletil, lord of Villette, and Saubelet de Dun, provost of Marville, who witness that it was made and done in the year of grace 1436, in November, 7th day.”

Six months after her first appearance at Marville, therefore, “the girl Claude” was again in that place as the Lady Jeanne Des Armoises. Meantime she had visited the Duchess of Luxembourg at Arlon, and had gone from there to Cologne in the company of Count Ulric of Würtemberg. Concerning the events that occurred at Cologne, we have the testimony of a writer who is not of a character to be accepted as a safe or unbiased authority. This is Johann Nider, a German ecclesiastic and member of the Inquisition, who died in 1438 or 1440. That he was a man of intense prejudices, and willing to go to a great length in the path marked out by a bigoted religious zeal, is shown by the fact that he asked and obtained permission from the Council of Bâle to attempt the conversion of the Hussites; and when these independent thinkers proved

unamenable to his persuasions, he declared a crusade against them, and thousands perished in the war in the defense of their belief. Such a man was not likely to regard impartially the character of one who had incurred the suspicion of the Holy Office; and it happened that the false Jeanne during her stay in Cologne had excited the wrath of the Inquisition, by undertaking to perform miracles, probably to support her credit as the Maid of Orleans, whom the common people had believed to be gifted with miraculous power.

Nider tells us that she restored a torn napkin and a broken glass whole as at first before the eyes of all the people, and escaped arrest by the Inquisition only by fleeing from Cologne with the aid of the Count of Würtemberg. He further relates that she married a knight, and left him to live as the paramour of a priest in Metz. Since this accords with no other record, we must believe that Nider's view of the subsequent history of one whom he regarded as an excommunicated sorceress and enemy of the church was colored by the rancor natural to the man and the Inquisitor.

Another writer, whose opinions are apparently based upon the testimony of Nider's *Formicarium*, is Antoine Dufaur, provincial of the Dominicans of France, and confessor of Louis XII. and Anne of Brittany, at whose request he composed the *Book of Celebrated Women*. He was a native of Orleans, and pronounced the sermon of the 8th of May, 1501. He should have been well informed; but, on the contrary, his notice of Jeanne d'Arc swarms with errors to such an extent that no well-informed histo-

rian thinks of quoting him. His notice of the false Jeanne may also be ruled out on the ground of his general unreliability. He says : —

“There has been since, one falsely called the Pucelle of Mans, hypocrite, idolater, sorceress, magician, dissolute, enchantress, who, according to her miserable estate, tried to do as much harm as Jeanne the Pucelle had done good. After her chimerical, fictitious, and false devotion she was abandoned of God and men, an arch-wanton of whom, for the honor of the good and virtuous, one does not wish long to write.”

The fine talent for invective displayed by men of the church was called out by any one unfortunate enough to incur their animosity, with little concern for the applicability of the epithets so lavishly bestowed, as is instanced by the fact that when Jeanne d’Arc was led to execution she wore on her head a mitre with the inscription ; “Relapsed heretic, apostate, idolater,” and on a tablet before the scaffold appeared these words : “Jeanne, who caused herself to be called the Maid, liar, pernicious, deceiver of the people, diviner, superstitious, blasphemer of God, presumptuous, denier of the faith of Jesus Christ, boaster, idolater, cruel, dissolute, invoker of devils, schismatic, and heretic.”

A reaction of indignation and disappointment was inevitable in Orleans when it was discovered that the Pucelle, then the Lady Jeanne Des Armoises, who had been received in 1439 with lavish gifts, splendid pageants, and costly festivities, was only a pretender foisted upon their credulity. The records of these events will be later referred to.

There remains to be considered the testimony of the so-called bourgeois of Paris, who it is now conceded was no bourgeois, but a learned member of the University. When the shameful course of the University in regard to Jeanne d'Arc is recalled, and it is observed that the *Journal of the Bourgeois of Paris* gives, as if in sympathy with it, an analysis of the sermon preached by the Inquisitor-General containing the most impudent fictions concerning the last moments of Jeanne d'Arc, and also the analysis of the sermon which the detestable Nicole Midi preached on the occasion of Jeanne's martyrdom, it will be evident that the author of the *Journal* was prejudiced in advance against any one recalling the name of the Maid of Orleans. It is therefore worthy of note that he does not repeat the scandalous charges made by Johann Nider. Although he had seen the false Jeanne as an exposed impostor "preached" before the people, he gives only a confused story of a penance that she had done at Rome for some act of ill temper, as to the occasion of which he loses himself in conjectures. He says:—

"At this time there was very great news of the Pucelle who was burned at Rouen, and there were many persons who were much deceived by her, and firmly believed that by her holiness she had escaped from the fire, and that they had burned another in her stead. But she was really burnt, and her ashes were thrown into the river.

"At this time men of arms brought one who had been very honorably received at Orleans; and when she was near Paris the great error recommenced of believing firmly that she was the Maid, and for this cause the University and Parliament made her come to Paris, willing or unwilling, and she was shown to the people in the

Palace on the marble stone of the great court; and she was preached and all her life and all her estate, and said that she was not a Maid, and that she had married a knight by whom she had two sons; and that she had done something for which she had to go to the Pope, like laying hands on father or mother, priest or clerk, violently, and that in order to guard her honor, for she said she struck her mother by chance, thinking she was another, and that she might have killed her mother, so great was the temper she was in, for her mother held her when she wished to strike one of her female friends, and for this cause it suited her to go to Rome, and she went there dressed as a man, and was soldier in the war for the Holy Father Eugene, and committed homicide twice, and when she was at Paris she (had already) returned to the war and was in garri-son; and then she went away."

This testimony of a resident of Paris at the time of the public penance of the impostor would naturally include every scandalous detail of the exposition made of "all her life and all her estate," and that he refers only to her marriage is a negative proof of great value in discountenancing the charges made from hearsay by the Dominican of Cologne.

So light a punishment inflicted upon a deceiver who for four years had occupied the attention of all France, who had been welcomed at Orleans, fêted by the nobility, and finally received by the king at court, is singularly in contrast to the habit of that blood-stained age, when Pier-ronne la Bretonne, a companion of Jeanne d'Arc in the war, was burned alive in Paris for no other fault than her expressed opinion that the Maid of Orleans was inspired by God.

How did it chance that after the false Jeanne's exposure

upon an improvised pillory, some say the great marble table in the hall of the Palace of Justice, she was allowed to go free, unchallenged and unharmed?

There is no doubt that a powerful influence had devised and maintained the imposture. Gilles de Laval, the Marshal de Retz, was one of the most distinguished noblemen of his time, and high in favor with the king, who had made him marshal of France at the time of the consecration at Reims. On that occasion he had been one of the four knights deputed to bring the sacred vial of holy oil from the abbey of St. Rémi. He had been the companion of Jeanne d'Arc in the war, and was one of her train when she had first entered Orleans. After the false Jeanne's return from Rome, she was in the war, and in garrison with the soldiers of the marshal, which is probably the time referred to in the somewhat confused statement of the author of the *Journal*.

In 1441 the following testimony was given by a former lieutenant of the marshal, arrested by Louis the dauphin for pillaging the country.

He says that "about two years ago, the late Sire de Retz, under whom he served, said to him that he was to go to Mans and take charge and government of the men of war who had with them one called Jeanne the Pucelle; promising that if he took Mans he should be captain of it." After hearing this, the king pardoned him for his pillaging, "in consideration of his services."

In 1439 the false Jeanne was in Orleans, after having delayed three years to appear in the city so intimately associated with the fame of her prototype. In the ac-

counts of the city of Orleans for the year 1436, the date of the pretender's appearance, the following records may be seen : —

9th day of August, 1436, letters carried from Jeanne the Pucelle, to messenger (so much).

To Jean du Lis, brother of Jeanne the Pucelle, Tuesday, Aug. 21st, 1436, 12 livres tournois, because he came to the Chamber and asked the procureurs to give him money to return to his sister. The King had ordered a hundred francs to be given to him ; they only gave him 20 ; he had spent 12, and had only 8 left, which was little to return with, seeing he was (five days) on horseback.

Aug. 25, to a messenger who brought letters from Jeanne the Pucelle (so much).

Oct. 28, 1436. To Cœur-de-lis (a herald) for a journey that he made for the city of Orleans to the Maid who was at Arlon in the duchy of Luxembourg, and to carry a letter which he brought from Jehanne the Pucelle to the King at Loches ; in which journey he took 41 days, that is to say 34 days in journey for the Pucelle, and seven days to go to the King. He set out to go to the Maid Tuesday last day of July, and he returned the 2nd day of Sept. following.

To Jaquet Leprestre, the 2nd day of Sept. 1436, for bread, wine, pears and nuts dispensed in the Chamber of the said city on the coming of the said Cœur-de-lis who brought the said letters from Jehanne the Pucelle, and for giving drink to the said Cœur-de-lis, who said he was very thirsty, for this 2 s. 4 d.p.

In the year 1439 the following accounts were recorded : —

July 18, 10 pintes and choppines of wine presented to Dame Jehanne des Armoises.

July 29, the same.

Last day of July, meat bought of Perrin Basin to present to Madame Jehanne des Armoises.

Wine for dinner and supper same day (so much).

Aug. 1st, wine at dinner when she left the city (so much).

To Jehanne des Armoises for gift to her made the first of August by deliberation made with the City Council, and for the good she did the city during the siege ; for this 201 l.p.

It was probably at this time that the famous Mystery of the Siege of Orleans was represented in this city at the expense of the Marshal de Retz, in honor of the Maid.

The following extract is from a Notice of Gilles de Retz by Armand Guéraud.

“ Sometimes he was at Paris, sometimes at Angers, sometimes at Orleans. He spent in this last city in less than a year as much as 80,000 or 100,000 crowns. He caused to be acted on the public square with more magnificence than was displayed at the entrance of Charles into Paris, the *Great Mysteries representing the Siege of Orleans*, with actors without number. The festivities on this occasion did not last less than three days. Each representation was followed by public banquets and copious distributions of hippocras.”

In 1440 the imposture was exposed ; and the same year the Marshal de Retz was brought to trial on charges long pending, and which he was no longer able to escape. It is impossible to avoid connecting the failure of his scheme concerning the false Jeanne with his immediate disgrace and execution, brought about, apparently, by the withdrawal of the king's favor, which left him at the mercy of his enemies.

The false Jeanne was summoned to court ; and when she was brought before Charles, who had purposely disguised himself, she recognized him as the true Jeanne had done on a similar occasion ; “ at which he was in amaze, and exclaimed, ‘ Welcome, Pucelle, my friend, in the name of

God who knows the secret that is between you and me.' Then, marvellously, after hearing that one word, the false Pucelle fell at the king's knees, crying for mercy, and confessing her treason, for which some were severely punished, as was suitable in such a case."¹

The impostor herself escaped with no punishment but that of open shame. The members of Jeanne's family continued to be rewarded with gifts and offices. The trial of the Marshal de Retz, however, set all France aghast with horror and amazement.

"This Gilles de Retz was a very great lord, of fine person, and good manners, well educated, and speaking Latin with elegance. He defied his judges; but he could not defy the crowd of witnesses, — bereaved parents who came weeping to tell how their children had been carried away and murdered. His accomplices turned against him; and finding it useless to deny, he began his confession, at which the hearers shuddered and made the sign of the cross. A ton of calcined skeletons was found in the tower of Chantocé, in the castle of Suze, and other places where he had been. This beast of extermination killed to obtain the favor of the demons, and the gifts of gold, science, and power. After a time he killed for the enjoyment he derived from it. He thought he could gain at once the favor of God and of the devil, and expected to bribe his judge with masses and processions. To the devil he had never vowed his soul, serving him with this reservation, and punctually fulfilling the duties of religion. He was condemned to the stake, but was put to death before the flames touched him; and his body was buried by members of his family, with their own hands, in the church of the Carmelites.

"The Marshal de Retz had pursued his horrible career for fourteen years without any one daring to accuse him; and he would

¹ Pierre Sala. *Hardiesses des grands Rois et Empereurs*.

never have been accused and condemned if three powers usually opposed to each other had not consented to his death, — the Bishop of Nantes, the Duke, and the King. The Duke was jealous of the Lavals ; the bishop was a personal enemy of De Retz ; and the King, to whom he had rendered services, and on whom he might perhaps rely, did not wish any more to defend the brigands who had done so much injury to his cause.”¹

Since the brigand especially referred to, De Retz’s lieutenant, was afterwards pardoned by the king, it is more likely that the sudden withdrawal of Charles’s favor was due to the exposure of the imposture in which the marshal had had so great a share. Although it is evident that Jeanne’s youngest surviving brother gave his active co-operation to the scheme, it is impossible to determine whether he was a party to the deception, or himself a dupe. The other brother, Pierre, a knight, does not appear in connection with the affair ; but twenty years later he is associated with his mother in a petition to the head of the church for the rehabilitation of Jeanne d’Arc.

The name used by the false Jeanne, Claude, is repeated for three succeeding generations in the descendants of this same Petit-Jean, who carried her letters from Arlon to the king. It would seem that he had a kindness for her memory.

It has been suggested that the pretender may have been Jeanne’s sister, Catherine, of whom history preserves only vague and contradictory records. This supposition furnishes a welcome clue in the consideration of the problem. A sister of the Maid, if resembling her in form and fea-

¹ Michelet, abridged and translated freely.

ture, might be able to counterfeit the true Pucelle so successfully as to impose upon the credulity of the people of Orleans, who cannot be suspected of acting in concerted support of a pretender, although it is conceivable that the brothers of the Maid might be induced to do so from motives of self-interest.

The mother of Jeanne d'Arc was a pensioner upon the bounty of the city of Orleans; and as noted in the accounts of the city, she was ill from the 7th day of July to the last day of August, 1440. Imagination may readily connect this illness with the grief resulting from the pretender's exposure, which occurred at this time.

As to the further history of the false Jeanne, after she "went away" from Paris, history gives us only a hint. About 1452 it is recorded that "a young woman played tennis with the curé of Sermaize. She said to him, 'Say boldly that you have played tennis with the Pucelle.' At which the deponent was right joyous."

It has been rashly concluded that this must be a second pretender, upon the ground that a woman of thirty-eight or forty could not come under the above definition, and would not be likely to indulge in a game of tennis.

Allowance may be made for the latitude of compliment in the statement of the gallant curé; and in these days of athletics for women the latter argument has no weight.

It is less credible, however, that after the false Jeanne had confessed the imposture with tears, and her life and estate had been exposed in Paris, she should later on make so unqualified a claim.

Some writers, falling into a grave confusion of dates,

have fixed the time of Johann Nider's history long posterior to his death, and have imagined that there was a third pretender as late as 1473, to whom some of the statements of the *Formicarium* are made to apply. This is an example of the inextricable confusion which results from the perpetuated misunderstanding of historical records.

An exact knowledge of the past is as impossible as a final conclusion in regard to any of the mysterious problems of man's destiny. "Our little life is rounded with a sleep;" and history is only the remembrance of a faded dream.

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